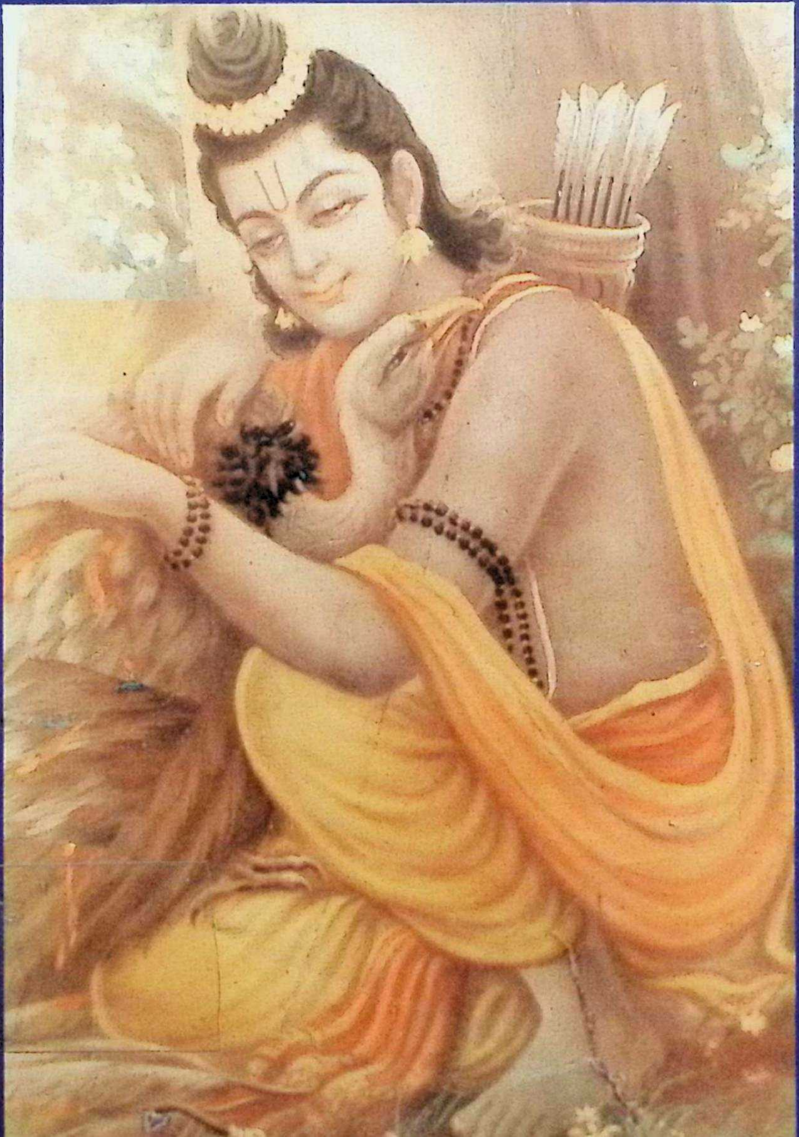
Shri Rama

the man, and his mission



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SHRI RAMA
THE MAN AND HIS MISSION

The book is chiefly a record of the activities of Shri Rama, the eldest son of King Dasaratha of Ayodhya (Oudh) in North India in the Treta-yuga. It is commonly believed that Shri Rama incarnated as such with the objective of getting the world rid of the menace of Demon King Ravana of Lanka (Ceylon).

In reality Shri Rama's long fourteen years of exile from Ayodhya, Capital of King Dasaratha's Kingdom (Oudh), was not only for the extermination of Demon King Ravana of Lanka.

The record of Shri Rama's life story during the period of his long fourteen years of exile ending with his victory over Ravana and also establishment of friendly relationships with various forest kingdoms extending over south India and Ceylon shows that his life's mission was mainly the establishment of cordial relationships for India with various territories and peoples in essence to show that man should be able to live in the world as friend to as large a number of people as possible.

And Shri Rama has shown that this is not only possible but salubrious for the peoples of the world at large.

Rs. 150

SHRI RAMA — THE MAN AND HIS MISSION

बयरु न कर काहू सन कोई। राम प्रताप विषमता खोई।।
पै सब नर करहिं परस्पर प्रीति। चलहिं स्वधर्म निरत श्रुति नीति।
नहिं दरिंद्र कोउ दुखी न दीना। नहिं कोउ अबुध न लछनहीना।।

(Shri Rama Charita Manas, UK 126/3)

None inimical to anyone else,
Unmindful of difference by Rama's grace;
All love and cherish all others
Following rule that everyone behoves;
None by poverty in distress
None unlettered and none in mess:
All helpful to one and all
All revere the wise and noble.

(Translation by Author)

SHRI RAMA
THE MAN AND HIS MISSION

G.N. Das

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FOREWORD

That is how Tulasi Das gave highest importance to "मानुष तनु" — the man. Rama, the Man with two hands and two legs, is most lovable to him. Even Kausalya renounces Rama with four hands. She requests Rama, saying "तजहु तात यह रूपा". Immediately, He assumes human form "शिशु". He starts doing "शिशुलीला". Kausalya, the mother, is a witness to this "लीला" till the last but Dasaratha, the Father, departs being heart-torn of separation from Rama. Rama maintains evenly all the qualities of man in him right from the beginning till the end.

It is true, everyone is born with a purpose. Rama knows it, but we all forget it. We make living to be the only purpose of life. Therefore, Rama has to manifest the mission of his life and then only it appears to be meaningful. Rama is shy of competing for getting anything. He gets up at the last for touching the bow in Dhanurjagyna at Mithila (Swayambara). He is not at all enthusiastic about that, although he is confident about the work which is lying ahead. But, he proclaims loudly when looks at the heaps of bones of the sages in the forest:

निसिचर हीन मही करों,
भुज उठाइ प्रण कीन्ह।

Search for Sita has got a double meaning for him, extermination of the evil-doers. Rama has nothing except his bow in his hand. He proceeds to face the great evil with the help of "बानर" (subhuman creatures) and "भालू" (sub-animals) and fulfils his mission. Rama Katha or the story of Rama has been told and retold through ages. The first is SHIVA. It comes to us from Valmiki in Sanskrit, the language of the Gods (देवभाषा). Now Tulasi Das has reconstructed it in "लोकभाषा" (language of common man). Similar reconstruction has been done in all the modern Indian languages (North, South, East and West) by whatever name we may recollect them. It has become a part of the life of an Indian because it speaks of a man and his mission. We cannot club it into a religious or sectorial (सांप्रदायिक) scripture because it does not fit into any such frame as known to us. Once we look at it as a journey of a man with his mission, it creates no problem. So far as his godliness is concerned, Tulasi has seen that God in every man, when he clearly states:

सीयराम मय सब जग जानी।
करहु प्रणाम जोरि जुग पानी।।

Tulasi has seen God in every man and he respects each and everyone like Sita, Rama. It is not by chance that he has not praised much the Devatas. On the other hand, he finds them full of evil qualities like enmity, anger, greed and so on. It is in the praise of man and in appreciation that Rama Katha is being held in so high esteem.

It is a great privilege to have been associated with this work by Sri G.N. Das. Mr. Das has seen man falling from grace, and machine occupying a higher place. No doubt, science and technology, the brainchild of man, have developed very fast but they have left behind the heart. Man with heart finds very insignificant role in the modern society. Rama has developed science and technology, but he was never heartless. G.N. Das has taken us very close to the understanding of Rama through his mission in an unequivocal voice, where traditional understanding of Rama through religion, sect, caste or Sampradaya is totally absent.

I pray to God, Mr. Das gives us a similar understanding of KRISHNA and such other man who had a mission.

Mr. Das, after crossing eighty springs, reincarnated in our favour for giving us guidance on the path from which we are drifting fast. He has put emphasis on the medieval stars shining from a distance by bringing them close to us in the contemporary language and idiom.

Bhubaneswar
7.3.97

S.L. Purohit

PREFACE

After meddling with "Mahabharata", the outstanding Epic of India to enlist what lessons we learn from it, I do not know how my attention was drawn to its elder brother in age, to eke out what the eminent Bhakti poet Goswami Tulasi Das has given to the Devanagari knowing world in the treasure of the narrative-cum-didactic poem entitled "Shri Rama Charita Manas" which is called his "magnum opus".

The scripture is woven round the life story of Shri Rama, eldest of four sons of king Dasaratha of Ayodhya situated in the ancient Kosala Kingdom of India.

The scripture "Shri Rama Charita Manas" is divided into seven cantos, namely — Bala Kanda, Ayodhya Kand, Aranya Kand, Kiskinda Kand, Sundar Kand, Lanka Kand and Uttar Kand.

In brief the story runs thus: King Dasaratha had four sons to his three queens Kousalya, whose son was Rama, the eldest; Kaikeyi the second whose son was Bharata the second; and Sumitra the third who had two sons, Lakshmana and Satrughna the two youngest.

As the sons grew up, they had their education in scriptures and military crafts under guidance of the great sage Vasistha, their preceptor. Then they started helping father Dasaratha in the affairs of the state to gain practical knowledge in statecraft.

In the forest region of Kosala kingdom which comprised of the Dandakaranya area, demons lived in large number who used to harass and often devour the saints and defile the sacrificial practices in hermitages dotted all over the forest.

Once sage Viswamitra visited king Dasaratha and requested him to spare sons Rama and Lakshmana to help the sages to ward off the demon menace to them. The demons owed their allegiance to the Demon King Ravana of Lanka and lived under his suzerainty. They harassed and devoured the innocent saints and sages frequently.

Accordingly Rama and Lakshmana accompanied sage Viswamitra. On their way to sage Viswamitra's hermitage, Rama slayed some demons such as Tadaka the demoness and Srupanakha the sister of Ravana on sojourn in Dandak who was made to lose her ear and nose by Lakshmana.

At sage Viswamitra's hermitage news reached them about the Swayambara ceremony going to be held at Janakpuri of king Janaka's daughter, Shri Sita. They proceeded there to see the ceremony.

The princes and kings who came to join the contest as suitors were required to break the great bow of Shiva, but even could not lift the huge ancient bow of Lord Shiva. The Swayambara was going to be foiled due to that. Sage Viswamitra permitted Rama to try to lift and break the bow. Rama did it easily and qualified to win the hand of Shri Sita the bride.

King Dasaratha, all the queens and brothers Bharata and Satrughna and counsellor Sumantra etc. were informed and invited by king Janaka to attend the ceremony. They did. In a joint meeting of kings Dasaratha and Janaka it was decided that the three sisters of Shri Sita would be given away in marriage to the three remaining brothers of Shri Rama. Accordingly the marriages of all four brothers were performed and solemnised.

On return to Ayodhya king Dasaratha resolved to perform "Abhiseka" of Shri Rama to anoint him as "Yubaraja" or successor to the throne of Ayodhya after him.

In the meantime, Manthara the vile maid of queen Kaikeyi insinuated with Kaikeyi to ask for the two boons that king Dasaratha owed to Kaikeyi. She chose to ask for them then and there for Bharata to be anointed as Yubaraja in place of Rama and Rama to go on exile of an unbroken period of 14 years with immediate effect. King Dasaratha tried to persuade queen Kaikeyi to refrain from insisting on that. But Kaikeyi was too adamant and stuck to her demand. Shri Rama on hearing of this was gladly ready to undertake the exile accompanied by Lakshmana and Shri Sita who persuaded father Dasaratha and all the mothers to accompany Shri Rama.

Bharata had gone to visit the maternal uncle, king of Kekaya territory. When Shri Rama went out on the exile accompanied by

Lakshmana and Shri Sita, king Dasaratha received a rude shock that made him bed ridden and in course of days, he breathed his last in bereavement of Shri Rama.

Guru Vasistha took immediate step to send for Bharata and on return he was extremely sorry to hear of the deplorable developments. He spurned the idea of being anointed as Yubaraja and proposed to visit brother Rama in the forest to persuade him to return.

Accompanied by all mothers, brothers and large number of Ayodhya citizens, Guru Vasistha and others, a huge deputation followed Bharata to the forest to meet Shri Rama, Lakshmana and Sita and to persuade Shri Rama to cut short the exile and return. King Janaka of Bideha father of Shri Sita on hearing of the developments also went to Chitrakuta to meet all of them.

After great deal of discussion it was agreed to leave the decision to Shri Rama. He held that father Dasaratha's decree about the exile and Bharata's taking charge of Ayodhya affairs should be followed in letter and spirit, now that father was no more. Bharata begged for brother Rama's wooden sandals (Kathau) which he carried on his head to Ayodhya to represent Shri Rama on the throne of Ayodhya till Shri Rama's return from exile. Bharata would worship the sandals and manage the affairs of the state on the advice of Guru Vasistha, counsellor Sumantra, etc. during the period of absence of Shri Rama, it was decided.

In the meantime, while Rama, Lakshmana and Shri Sita were at Panchabati on exile Ravana, king of Lanka, abducted Shri Sita in the absence of both Rama and Lakshmana from their leaf hut at Panchabati.

With the help of Nala and Nila two expert craftsmen of Monkey tribe and hordes of monkey and bear workers the floating bridge to Lanka was completed in record time and the army of monkey and bear soldiers crossed over to Lanka.

There was severe fighting between the demon and monkey soldiers in which Ravana was killed with all his sons and supporters. His younger brother Bibhisana was anointed successor to Ravana and enthroned in a ceremony attended by Shri Rama, Lakshmana and Shri Sita.

Thereafter, Shri Rama, Lakshmana and Shri Sita accompanied by king Bibhisana came to Ayodhya in the aerial chariot of king Bibhisana where they were given a rousing reception by the Ayodhya citizens and Shri Rama was enthroned as king of Ayodhya. Brothers Bharata, Lakshmana and Satrughna held the Royal umbrellas and emblems of Ayodhya Royal House in token of honour due to the brothers.

The reign of Shri Rama continued for a long period of over thirty years during which the people of Ayodhya lived in peace and prosperity of which the poet has given a graphic account in his words which are worth repetition:

बयरू न कर काहू सन कोई। राम प्रताप विषमता खोई।।
सब नर करहिं परस्पर प्रीति। चलहिं स्वधर्म निरत श्रुति नीति।।
नहिं दरिद्र कोउ दुखी न दीना। नहिं कोउ अबुध न लछनहीना।।

None inimical to anyone else
Unmindful of difference by Shri Rama's grace;
All love and cherish all others
Everyone follows the rule that behoves;
None by poverty, in distress
None unlettered and none in mess;
All helpful to one and all
All revere the wise and noble.

In the foregoing pages, we get a brief pen picture of Shri Rama, the man, the eldest son of king Dasaratha of Ayodhya. Many take him as a full incarnation of God Almighty and not an ordinary mortal.

My thoughts turn at this point to the words of the celebrated English poet William Wordsworth of the 18th-19th century (1770-1850) contained in his immortal poem entitled "Ode on Intimations of Immortality" where he says of human beings as

"Trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God who is our home."

And

"To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."

Being sons of God human beings are capable of attaining the highest level of development provided they get some inspiration in that direction. As for example the people who lived during the reign of Shri Rama (Rama Rajya) being inspired by the exemplary life style of Shri Rama attained the high level of character and personality delineated by poet Goswami Tulasi Das. Based on the wisdom and conscience with which human beings have been endowed, and on the inspiration they received from Shri Rama's exemplary life style they too acquired praiseworthy qualities of which the poet makes mention in his words quoted above.

In short, it can be said that human beings have been endowed with the ability to live with godly qualities provided they get an exemplary character to inspire them in that direction. This was available in plenty during the reign of Shri Rama which provided the people with the inspiration and guidance.

I would like to add a few of the significant messages of Shri Rama for the benefit of the genial reader to appreciate what Shri Rama desired to convey:

निसिचर हीन मही करौं, भुज उठाइ प्रन कीन्ह।
सकल मुनिन के आश्रमहिं, जाइ जाइ सुख दीन्ह।

(Shri Rama Charita Manas, p. 41)

I shall rid the world of unrighteous people
    So Rama vowed upraising his arms
Visiting the forest hermitages
    Gave solace to the devout sage inmates.

जात पात कुल धरम बड़ाई। धन बल परिजन गुन चतुराई।।
भगतिहीन नर सोहइ कैसे। बिनु जल बारिद पेखिअ जैसे।।

(Shri Rama Charita Manas, pp. 49 & 82)

Greatness claimed on strength of clan
    Or of riches or wit of man
The devotion bereft looks as empty
    As rainless clouds of sky to scan.

परहित बस जिन के मन माहीं। तिन्हकु दुर्लभ जग कछु नाहीं।।
परहित सरिस धरम नहिं भाई। पर पीड़ा सम नहिं अधमाई।।

(Shri Rama Charita Manas, p. 82)

Whoever is bent on helping others
Nothing is rare for him on earth
No merit is equal to helping the poor
None as vile to harass on life's path.

भगतिवंत अति नीचहि प्रानी। मोहि प्राणप्रिय अस मम बानी।।

(Shri Rama Charita Manas, p. 82)

However lowly, if devout at heart
I declare is dear to me as the smart.

From the above, it will be clear to the genial reader that Shri Rama incarnated on earth as man not only to exterminate Ravana of Lanka but for multifarious good of human beings, beasts, birds and all created beings including worms and creepers.

G.N. Das

MESSAGE

I am glad that Shri Gananath Das, at his advanced age of over eighty, has been able to produce his book "Shri Rama — The Man and His Mission". This is a creditable achievement and I congratulate him for successfully performing it.

I shall be happy to see some further works of this nature from him and I pray to the Almighty to bless him with good health and inspiration needed to succeed in his ventures.

Jai Shri Rama.

Bhubaneswar **B.B. Pani**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply indebted to Dr. S.L. Purohit, Professor of Hindi in the B.J.B. College, Bhubaneswar and a distinguished scholar on Shri Rama Charita Manas of Goswami Tulasi Das, to have been good enough for giving an illuminating Foreword to the book "Shri Rama — The Man and His Mission", and also to have taken pains to put all the quotations in Devanagari script in the pages of the book.

I am grateful to Sj. B.B. Pani, Director Arbouriculture, Government of Orissa and a Ramayani of long standing repute, for having favoured me with a message for the book.

I am thankful to my daughter-in-law Smt. Subhra Das for planning and getting an appropriate cover design being the image of Shri Rama during exile caressing the King Kite "Jatayu" who tried to prevent Ravana from abducting Shri Sita in his chariot and received a mortal bleeding wound in the process demonstrating thereby the great affection and compassion of Shri Rama for all beings of earth, men, beasts, birds, creepers, etc.

I bless Smt. Subhra for her talented help rendered to me.

I am thankful to Shri Jiban Kumar Sahoo for having neatly typed out all the English portions of the book.

CHAPTER I

PROLOGUE

On a simple interpretation, the above title would mean — with what objective did the Almighty incarnate as Shri Rama in the "Treta Yuga"?

In the subsequent Age as Shri Krishna, during the great Mahabharata war of Kurukhetra between the Kouravas and Pandavas in which Shri Krishna acted as charioteer to Arjuna, the middle Pandava prince, he disclosed his identity in the following words in order to convince Arjuna to engage in the battle wholeheartedly as his preordained duty without wavering to fight against near relations or friends which he had to do:

यदा यदाहि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारतः।
अभ्युत्थामधर्मस्य तदात्मानम् सृजाम्यहम्।।
परित्राणाय साधुनाम्, विनाशाय च दुष्कृताम्।
धर्म संस्थापनार्थाय संभवामि युगे युगे।।

In other words, "when righteousness declines and unrighteousness becomes rampant on a universal scale, I reincarnate myself in order to save the righteous from the oppression of the unrighteous and to re-establish the righteous by exterminating the villainous."

That in essence is also what brought about the incarnation of Shri Rama as the eldest son of king Dasaratha of Ayodhya to wife Kousalya, Shri Rama's mother.

Shri Rama grew up along with his three brothers, Bharata, son to mother Kaikeyi and Lakshmana and Satrughna sons to mother Sumitra. When the princes grew up, they were put in charge of Guru Vasistha as their preceptor.

While they were thus studying with Guru Vasistha some more years went by. One day the great ancient sage Viswamitra visited king Dasaratha to ask for sons Shri Rama and Lakshmana to help in the eradication of the demons who were harassing the sages in their holy duties and sacrificial operations by interfering therein and defiling them in their hermitages.

King Dasaratha produced Shri Rama and Lakshmana before sage Viswamitra to see for himself in order to impress upon him as to how tender they were in age and so how arduous it would be for them to face the powerful demons of the forest. But, before he pleaded with the great sage in that vein, the wise Sumantra, the king's counsellor, who knew the king's mind, advised him to refrain from doing that. "Viswamitra is a very wise sage with immense potentialities of a great sage and he was not making naive request in order to secure the help of Shri Rama and Lakshmana to rid the scourge of the demons to the saints in the forest. He would himself be more than a father to the boys during the period and would give all the protection and advice they needed and was fully aware of the abilities of the youthful princes", said Sumantra.

Dasaratha yielded to the pleadings of Sumantra and presented the young princes, Shri Rama and Lakshmana, to proceed with Viswamitra after taking leave of their mothers.

Kousalya was in the know of the developments and ready to agree in the king's decision.

When Lakshmana begged for mother Sumitra's permission to accompany brother Shri Rama with sage Viswamitra, Sumitra readily and gladly agreed saying in the words of the poet:

अवध तहां जहँ राम निवासा। दिवस तहां जहँ भानु प्रकासा।।

In other words, "Go dear son, go with Shri Rama. For, Ayodhya is there where Shri Rama resides; as day is there where the sun shines." Thus was Lakshmana blessed by mother Sumitra to be by the side of Shri Rama during his sojourn in the forests.

King Dasaratha made over the princes Shri Rama and Lakshmana to sage Viswamitra saying: "They are sons to you, O great sage! Let them be of good service to you in exterminating the troublesome demons."

On the way to sage Viswamitra's hermitage in the forest, they passed by the abandoned hermitage of sage Goutama. Seeing the dishevelled condition of the hermitage and surroundings Shri Rama asked sage Viswamitra the reasons thereof. The princes were led to the crumbled hermitage where in the midst of some boulders and feeble remains of Goutama's hermitage, Viswamitra recounted the story of the curse of sage Goutama to which his wife Ahalya succumbed, saying: "Years ago she was turned to stone gradually reduced to a rubble. In that form she is repeating all these years your name in the hope of her redemption. Ahalya was a very graceful lady and Indra, the king of heaven, was lustful of her. One day, taking advantage of sage Goutama's absence from the hermitage, Indra came there in the garb of sage Goutama and wheedled her to have sex with him. Unfortunately for Indra, sage Goutama returned to the hermitage at that juncture to find his wife and another in sexual posture. He cursed his wife as above and also cursed Indra to have a thousand genitals hanging all over his body. Ahalya turned to stone at once and Goutama abandoned the hermitage and left for an unknown destination. Indra lost his position as King of the Gods of Heaven.

"Since then Ahalya is lying as a rubble and waiting for your touch to attain her redemption. She may be blessed to rise unto heaven to live with her husband, Goutama, who had preceded her there." When Rama touched the rubble with his foot Ahalya emerged from there and rose up to the sky on her way to heaven to meet sage Goutama, her husband, there.

Then accompanied by Shri Rama and Lakshmana sage Viswamitra proceeded on way to his hermitage in the forest.

On their way a fierce demoness, Tadaka by name, attacked them but lost her life to the shaft of Shri Rama.

While staying in the hermitage of Viswamitra, news reached them about the 'Swayambara' festival of Baidehi (Sita) daughter of king Janaka of Bideha. On the suggestion of sage Viswamitra they proceeded to visit Bideha to witness the Swayambara festival. On reaching Bideha sage Viswamitra presented Shri Rama and Lakshmana to king Janaka who made arrangements for their accommodation in a guest house in the palace premises and also sent a messenger in a fast moving chariot to invite king Dasaratha and queens Kousalya, Kaikeyi, Sumitra and sons Bharata and Satrughna to reach speedily for the Swayambara function five days off.

The messenger returned on the 4th day with king Dasaratha, the queens and remaining sons Bharata and Satrughna. They were all suitably accommodated in guest houses to attend the Swayambara function.

In the Swayambara arena, the invited princes and kings and nobles and all suitors were assembled on the appointed day. Shri Rama and Lakshmana were very happy to see the huge gathering of princes and kings from various parts of the country. The mighty ancient bow of Shiva was placed on a huge platform and the suitors were required to bend and break the bow to win the hand of Baidehi.

Prince after prince, king after king tried, but none could as much as even lift the ancient bow of Shri Shiva from the table, far from being able to try to bend and break it to meet the terms of the Swayambara. Shri Rama and Lakshmana were looking on with amusement and wondering how the warriors and heroes were failing in their effort to lift the bow.

Despondence was about to quell the festival to end in failure.

Sage Viswamitra looked at Shri Rama and queried by his look if he would try. Shri Rama, who was confident, bowed to the great sage and humbly replied, "If you permit, Sir, I may try."

On sage Viswamitra giving his assent in the following words of the poet:

उठहु राम भंजहु भव चापा। मेटहु तात जनकु परितापा।।

"Get up dear Rama and break the bow
And rid king Janaka of his sorrow now."

Shri Rama again bowed to sage Viswamitra and proceeded humbly to take up the bow without the slightest sign of ego in his looks. He easily picked the bow up which many known warriors and heroes of the princely order had failed even to lift. Shri Rama not only bent but trying to break it as required by putting further pressure, the mighty bow broke into two making a terrific sound like the clash of thunder that was heard all over the three worlds far and wide.

Everyone present in the vast Swayambara gathering showered praise on the youthful prince of Ayodhya and respectful honour on sage Viswamitra, the preceptor.

On the very next day which was auspicious for the occasion the marriage was to be solemnised as proposed by king Janaka. In the meantime, in personal discussions of the kings and queens of both Royal houses of Ayodhya and Bideha, it was decided that the three marriageable daughters of Bideha king's brothers, sisters of Baidehi (Shri Sita) would also be given away in marriage to Bharata, Lakshmana and Satrughna in accordance with their respective age seniority compared to that of the brothers of Shri Rama and of Shri Sita in age. This received approval of preceptor Vasistha and sage Viswamitra both of whom were happy about it and the hearty unanimous decision taken by the approbation of the heads and seniors of the two Royal families present.

After the marriage ceremonies were performed and solemnised the newly wedded princes of Ayodhya and other guests from Ayodhya remained as guests to Bideha for a week and thereafter, they were given a heart touching send off and accompanied by Sumantra, representing the Bideha house, the party left with the daughters and one each of their closest relations i.e. younger or elder brother who accompanied the guests half way according to custom.

At Ayodhya, the people gave the princes and their newly wed wives a touching warm welcome on a grand scale. Shri Rama was the team guardian of the newly wedded brothers and the atmosphere of wholehearted understanding and affection among the brothers and their wives was remarkably cordial.

Festivities and receptions to guests continued for over a week at Ayodhya. Poor people and Brahmanas were fed and given plenty of gifts and presents according to custom.

Later, the brothers attended to the specific matters left in their charge i.e. Shri Rama in overall charge of supervision of the general administration at the State level and Bharata, Lakshmana and Satrughna in charge of specific matters such as health and education by Bharata, military and police matters by Lakshmana and general welfare and agriculture, administration of legal matters by Satrughna.

The overall administration was looked after by Shri Rama in consultation with the king who discussed with the other sons as and when necessary. This kept the princes and king Dasaratha occupied as in normal times.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND

As we have seen in the foregoing chapter the unrighteous come to the fore in few or more cases and make it impossible for the universe to run on orderly lines. That makes it necessary for the Almighty to intervene and take steps to re-establish peace and order for the universe to run according to the established principles.

As the scriptures say unrighteousness reached the climax in the "Treta Yuga" with villainous Ravana of Lanka (Ceylon).

He not only covered Asia, Europe, America, Africa and other continents of the world, all the worlds of the universe, and he wanted to bring the Gods of Heaven under his sway. He tried to build a ladder to Swarga or Heaven but could not complete it. The Gods of Heaven were quaking in fear as they knew him to be a demon of immense power derived from boon of Lord Shiva, capable of bringing the Gods of Heaven under his sway too.

During this period, king Manu ruled over India. Both he and his wife queen Satarupa were greatly devoted to the Almighty. They repaired to the forest and engaged in years of meditation on Him ceaselessly, living on fruits of trees and water and later, for as many more years on water only, and further again on air only to gain shelter of the Almighty.

Moved by the deep meditation of the devotees king Manu and queen Satarupa, the Almighty called upon them on airy voice from the sky saying: "O king and queen I am pleased with your unique devotion, declare what you would like to have, and I shall grant that without restraint."

In reply, the king said, "O Lord Almighty who is served by Vishnu, Brahma and Shiva in eternity, if you are so pleased be merciful to show yourself up as you stay in Shivaji's heart. We shall have a full view of yourself in that form. Do us this favour O Lord."

And, the Lord did disclose Himself against the blue of the sky in His brightest glory of green and gold with incomparably beautiful features of face and eyes, nose and forehead, with winsome smile parting the lips, ears adorned with "Kundala" of gems and chest covered with glistening necklace of gold and gems.

King Manu and queen Satarupa's gaze was fixed on the lotus feet of the Lord and king Manu said in emotion shaken voice, "O Lord having a full view of your lotus feet my desires are all fulfilled except one and that is what you know my Lord, grant me that one desire if you please."

The Lord spoke from the sky, "O king, for your love-devotion, I have nothing that I cannot freely bestow on you. Name what you want and you shall have that."

Promptly did king Manu reply in sweet and soft words, "O Lord, bless us with a son like you, if you please."

The Lord smiled and replied, "but, where can I search to find a son like me, better that I be born to Dasaratha, king of Ayodhya and to queen Kousalya, as Rama." The Lord then turning to queen Satarupa said, "O Queen do ask what you would like to have as a boon, do not feel shy."

She promptly replied, "O Lord what my Lord, the king, has asked for is as dear to me as to him. Do grant that boon I pray, O Lord!"

"But do ask for some special boon from your side too", urged the Lord to queen Satarupa, begging the question.

She said promptly, "O Lord like the snake without its gem and the fish without water cannot exist in life, let my life be so without Your love-devotion!" Both king Manu and queen Satarupa laid themselves down at His feet clutching hold of the feet fast in hand.

The Lord smiled and said, "As both of you desire let it be so. I will give that to you to fulfil your desire. Now get up."

And the Lord added, "Both of you spend some years in Amarabati, Heaven's capital, and then take birth as king Dasaratha of Ayodhya and principal queen Kousalya and I shall take birth as your son to queen Kousalya there."

CHAPTER III

MARRIAGE

In due course, after many and many more years, Dasaratha happened to be king of Ayodhya with his three queens Kousalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra. And we have noticed in the earlier chapter how he was blessed with four sons, Shri Rama to queen Kousalya, Bharata to queen Kaikeyi and Lakshmana and Satrughna to queen Sumitra.

And, at the request of sage Viswamitra, Shri Rama and Lakshmana were allowed by the king to accompany him to help rid the sages living in the forests of the scourge of demons. On the way, demon Tadaka who attacked them was killed by the arrow of Shri Rama.

They proceeded to the hermitage of sage Viswamitra where they heard that the Swayambara of Baidehi (Sita) daughter of the Bideha king, Janaka, was being held and on the suggestion of sage Viswamitra they all proceeded to see the Swayambara festival. Shri Rama took part in the contest and broke the mighty Shiva bow to qualify for marrying Baidehi.

In the meantime, Shri Rama and Lakshmana with the permission of precgptor Vasistha and sage Viswamitra visited Bideha to enjoy the beauteous spots of the city and see attractive centres there. While visiting the sacred Gouri Temple in the palace premises Shri Rama had the opportunity to meet Shri Sita who was also visiting the temple at that time. Later, he spoke to brother Lakshmana about the impression the meeting of Shri Sita created in his heart, in the following words of the poet:

जासु बिलोकि अलौकिक सोभा। सहज पुनीत मोर मन छोभा।।
सो सबु कारण जान बिधाता। फरकहिं सुभग अंग सुनु भ्राता।।
रघुबंसिन्ह कर सहज सुभाउ। मन कुपंथ पगु धरहि न काउ।।
मोहि अतिसय प्रतीति मन केरी। जेहि सपनेहु पर नारि न हेरी।।

In other words, "Listen brother, on seeing the exceptional beauty of Baidehi, my mind which is ever steady and pure became agitated and my right side limbs quaked visibly, I know not why. God alone knows why it happened so. You know very well none belonging to the clan of Raghus never consciously takes any vile step and has never dreamt of casting lustful glance at another's spouse."

On their arrival, king Dasaratha, queens Kousalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra and sons Bharata and Satrughna were accommodated in suitable guest houses in the Janakpura palace premises where Shri Rama and Lakshmana and sage Viswamitra had already been accommodated on their arrival. Shri Rama and Lakshmana sought sage Viswamitra's permission to call on father Dasaratha and the mothers and brothers and others who had arrived from Ayodhya, and on being so permitted Shri Rama and Lakshmana went to their rooms in the palace premises and met and paid homage to all the seniors. They all stayed for a couple of days for attending the Swayambara on the appointed day.

In the meantime, while waiting for the return of the messenger from Ayodhya with king Dasaratha and the queens and remaining brothers of Shri Rama, there came to the Swayambara site Brahmarshi Parasurama upset on hearing the terrific sound of the breaking of bow. From the very sound thereof, Parasurama, disciple of Lord Shiva, who knew the weapons of his preceptor in and out, reached the Swayambara site as some of the participants and others were awaiting the arrival of the invited guests from Ayodhya.

Parasurama was totally upset by towering rage at the temerity of the person who dared to break his preceptor's bow which was so sacred to him. And he began shouting at the guests present there to point out the person who had broken the bow in question.

Prince Lakshmana, younger brother of Shri Rama, could not but retort Parasurama saying, "O Great 'Bipra' why are you so upset at mere breaking of a bow. Being Khatriyas whose racial profession is warfare in which swords, bow and arrows and other arms are widely used by the warriors, they are often broken in use which is a usual happening that none bothers about. Why does this petty incident enrage and upset you? Better go about your own business without bothering others."

This angered Parasurama who retorted, "You 'Tapas' boy what do you know about Lord Shiva's sacred bow which has been put to an absurd use and broken. I am Lord Shiva's disciple and so I have every right to intervene and punish the person concerned."

Shri Rama noticed that the wordy duel was going to lead to worse results. So, he addressed Parasurama and spoke politely, "Sir, please do not get upset by the words of the youngster and do not mind mistake committed by youngsters. Lakshmana had nothing to do with the matter. Rather, I am at fault, if you think it so. I am merely Rama, son of king Dasaratha, and I participated in the Swayambara Festival held here as a suitor with the permission of my preceptor saint Viswamitra, present here, and while taking up the bow to string it up as required it broke of itself. If all present here think as you do that I have committed a grievous fault thereby, I shall be amenable to any punishment that you and others decide that I deserve."

And he added, "Please do not mind the words of the youthful brother of mine, excuse him for his words and as for me if you all find me guilty I shall be ready for the punishment you mete out."

Parasurama was completely satisfied with the polite words of Shri Rama to assuage his ire. Parasurama took leave of Shri Rama and left for the forests to engage in holy deeds and meditation. The politeness of Shri Rama is worth notice which could assuage the ire of Parasurama.

The following day the invited guests came with king Dasaratha and queens Kousalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra and brothers Bharata and Satrughna with their presents for the new relations.

There was cordial discussion between the heads of the two Royal families and it was decided to have the marriages of all the four princes of Ayodhya, Shri Rama, Bharata, Lakshmana and Satrughna with the princesses of Bideha, Shri Sita, Shri Mandabi, Shri Urmila and Shri Shrutakirti, respectively. This was approved by sage Vasistha, saga Viswamitra and other sages and revered pundits on both sides who showered blessings on the princes and princesses.

The very next day was fixed for the marriages to be performed and solemnised with sacrificial fires at four places around a large altar set up for the purpose. This was followed by bounties of immense gifts of gold and gems and silk textiles by king Janaka as presents for each pair of prince and princess married. For each daughter was sent a maid to attend to her personal needs till she became familiar with her new surroundings at Ayodhya.

When the four newly wed pairs together came after the function to bow to father Dasaratha and mothers Kousalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra the hearts of not only the parents but the visitors and on-lookers were filled with immense happiness and everyone sang in praise of the two elderly kings and the queens of both the Royal houses and the sages and preceptors on both sides for having made such a sagacious and far reaching decision about the marriages of the princes and princesses.

CHAPTER IV

EXILE

On return to Ayodhya, king Dasaratha who was growing old, after the sons' marriages, felt that it was high time to elect and perform "Abhiseka" ceremony of the "Yubaraja" who was to succeed him as the king of Ayodhya. He had made up his mind to anoint Shri Rama the eldest of his sons as Yubaraja and perform the "Abhiseka" ceremony accordingly. He consulted Guru Vasistha to obtain his approval on the issue and fix the same for an auspicious day. Guru Vasistha unhesitatingly supported him saying, "The people of Ayodhya love Shri Rama and all would be immensely pleased if he was elected as Yubaraja. And, as for an auspicious day, any day which is selected for the ceremony of the Abhiseka of Shri Rama, will doubtless be fully auspicious for the purpose." Sage Viswamitra and some other sages who were present fully corroborated the opinion of Guru Vasistha.

In the meantime, however, queen Kaikeyi had been influenced by her vile maidservant Manthara who had reminded her mistress that king Dasaratha had promised her two boons for the service rendered by her at the time of the war with the Gods of Heaven which the king had waged and promised to grant to her any time she chose to have them. She added saying "If you concede everything to Kousalya, your position in the harem will be reduced to that of maid, and you and your son will spend your days in the service of Kousalya and her son." This made Kaikeyi to ponder and she made up her mind to resist the attempt of co-wife Kousalya by hook or by crook.

Kaikeyi chose it now or never for the king to fulfil his promise and disclosed that she would like her son Bharata to be anointed as Yubaraja instead of Shri Rama and secondly, Shri Rama should immediately leave on exile to the forests for a term of fourteen years from the following day on which the Abhiseka ceremony was to be performed.

This came as a bolt from the blue to king Dasaratha who had not anticipated any such move against Shri Rama and least of all from Kaikeyi to whom Shri Rama was the darling son. But the vile Manthara's vicious words had poisoned her mind and in order to be effective she repaired to the "Kopa Mandira" (the ire room) with terrible wrath in her mind.

When king Dasaratha was not able to find his favourite queen Kaikeyi he made enquiries and himself went to the "Kopa Mandira" in the palace premises and enquired of Kaikeyi. She was completely under sway of her terrible rage and would not budge to the pleading of king Dasaratha to accept his point. Lying on the dirty ground in the room she retorted "O king, I believe you remember the promise made to me to grant me two boons whenever I desired to have them. Today and now I want the fulfilment of your promise. The two boons wanted by me are one, my son Bharata must be anointed Yubaraja and two, Shri Rama must go on an exile for fourteen years in the forests, never setting his foot in Ayodhya before the period of exile was over."

And queen Kaikeyi continued:

"But you have sent away my son Bharata to his maternal place for no urgent or specific work at the moment. That is just to avoid his presence here when you intend to anoint Shri Rama as Yubaraja. I cannot tolerate this kind of stabbing from the back. Do proclaim that my son Bharata will be anointed as Yubaraja and Shri Rama will proceed on exile for 14 years in the forest. Only that will satisfy me. Otherwise, I shall not leave this dungeon and shall go without food and drink till I succumb and die."

King Dasaratha was stunned. He whispered as though talking to himself , "Are you serious Kaikeyi dear?" he queried the enraged queen Kaikeyi. She flung at king Dasaratha insolently, "What else? You think there is no reason for me to lie here in the dust and dirt of the Kopa Bhavan? You remember you had promised me two boons when with my help you could defeat the gods of heaven and without my aid you would have surely been worsted by them. The two boons I want of you are—my son Bharata must succeed you to the throne of Ayodhya, and in order to attain that he must now be anointed as Yubaraja and not Rama."

"But", interposed king Dasaratha meekly, "Is not Shri Rama the eldest of the princes and has not he got the backing of the elders, of the people and the learned and wise?"

"Be that what it may", retorted Kaikeyi, "the only point for you to decide is whether you are going to accept my demand for the two boons promised by you. Is not it well known to you what the poets have sung about the long standing practice of the kings of Raghu Clan:

रघुकुल रीति सदा चलि आई। प्राण जाहि पर बचन न जाई।।

"The well established long standing practice of the Raghus has been, that they will prefer to lose their lives, but swerve not from their words!" If that is true, let there be no more talk on this, either you grant me the two boons you promised or you leave me alone here to die without more words!" And she repeated, "The two boons I want are: one, tomorrow, my son Bharata will be anointed Yubaraja and two, Shri Rama shall go on exile for fourteen years in the forests."

As soon as Kaikeyi finished her say in the above vein king Dasaratha was touched to the quick as though by a stab to his heart with a sharp weapon and swooned where he sat by the side of queen Kaikeyi. There was none else in the "Kopa Bhavan" room other than king Dasaratha and queen Kaikeyi.

After a considerable time when king Dasaratha revived he wailed "Shri Rama, O Shri Rama, you had better go to the forest on exile for 14 years, not waiting for your nomination as Yubaraja, let Bharata be installed in your place...do not worry! You will not lose your position as the first born. People know you well and will continue to love you and Bharata too will continue to love and adore you as before."

Addressing Kaikeyi king Dasaratha said:

"O Queen Kaikeyi get up now, I accept your words, you shall have the two boons you crave. Do not grieve any more."

Kaikeyi got up and faintly smiling at king Dasaratha said, "Before break of day you send for Rama and tell him in my presence that you have granted me the two boons, and Rama should act accordingly without remorse. Or else I must put an end to my life."

At daybreak it was Shri Rama's wont to come to king Dasaratha's apartment to start the day's work after bowing to father and mother Kaikeyi and Kousalya and Sumitra in that order. That morning he was happy to find both father and mother Kaikeyi together in mother Kaikeyi's apartment and he laid himself at their feet and getting up said, "What an auspicious day today is for me to find both father and mother together!" He took the dust of their feet again and again and put to his forehead.

Father Dasaratha was mute, but mother Kaikeyi opened her lips and after blessing Shri Rama said, "Son your father had granted two boons to me long time ago to take effect whenever I liked and I want that to take effect today, now. He has decreed that you go on exile for a period of fourteen years from today and in your place, Bharata be anointed as Yubaraja. I am sure you will not grieve for that."

The efforts of Raja Dasaratha to impress on queen Kaikeyi the justification for anointing Shri Rama as Yubaraja had more and more adverse effect on her. As her ultimatum she uttered in the following words of the poet:

होत प्रात मुनि बेष धरि, जौं न राम बन जाहिं।
मोर मरन राउ अपजस, नृप समुझिअ मन माहिं।।

"O king listen carefully if early tomorrow at dawn Shri Rama does not leave the palace in the garb of a sage, my death is certain then and there and the entire blame will be yours to shoulder."

On hearing these words, king Dasaratha became overpowered by sorrow. He caught hold of queen Kaikeyi's feet and getting her seated, begged of her "not to become an axe to the Raghu Clan", meaning thereby not to create such situations as would bring terrible disasters to the Clan of Raghu and bring an untimely end to it.

The king further urged, "If you insist on the exile of Shri Rama for fourteen years as you demand, that will cause irreparable loss to all the living members of Raghu Clan and thereby the Clan will come to an untimely end."

Queen Kaikeyi retorted again, "Why then did you press me again and again to tell you what I wanted if you had reservations like this?"

Shri Rama smiled his usual smile at mother Kaikeyi and said, “If father has favoured me with the bigger realm of the forest region to take charge instead of the tiny kingdom of Ayodhya, I consider myself fortunate and I am happy. Who other than Bharata my dear brother will adorn the position of “Yubaraja” better? I shall myself break the good news to him and clear the way for him beforehand.”

The next morning king Dasaratha was unusually late in getting up. The palace inmates were surprised to hear that the whole of the previous night the king did not have any sleep. He was awake and repeating the name of Shri Rama all the time.

Hearing this all present asked Sumantra to bring Shri Rama from his apartment. When Sumantra informed Shri Rama he readily accompanied him and went to the king’s apartment to pay the usual morning obeisance to the parents.

There, Shri Rama met both king Dasaratha and queen Kaikeyi. The king who was further immersed in deep sorrow became totally speechless on seeing Shri Rama. So, mother Kaikeyi explained to Shri Rama what the king had agreed to in sequence to the two boons to her.

Shri Rama did not show any untoward reaction to the boons to the effect that Shri Bharata would be anointed Yubaraja instead of him and that he would go on exile to the forests for an unbroken period of fourteen years. On the contrary, he expressed his readiness to carry out the wishes of the parents and said, “That son indeed is fortunate who fulfils the desires of his parents and such offsprings were indeed rare on earth!” And he added as in the words of the poet:

जौं न जाउँ बन ऐसेहि काजा। प्रथम गनिय मोहि मूढ़ समाजा।।

“If I do not forthwith undertake this mission and proceed on exile to the forest, I shall be rightly deemed a fool of the first water by the people.”

To mother Kaikeyi, Shri Rama further said, “Not only that. I shall be lucky to meet and learn from the sages in the forests which will be a larger domain for me to administer. Let me quickly take mother Kousalya’s and Sumitra’s permission and prepare to leave for the forests early tomorrow morning.”

Addressing the king Shri Rama said, "Revered Father on such an auspicious occasion do please discard all discontent and bid me undertake my mission in happy mood."

The people of Ayodhya, on hearing of the exile of Shri Rama and anointing of Bharata instead, were taken aback and sorrow-struck. They observed that Shri Bharata will not be happy at all for the change for he loves Shri Rama more than his own life. Queen Kaikeyi too had declared long ago that Shri Rama was dearer to her heart than her own son Bharata. What had happened to upset all that they wondered and found fault with queen Kaikeyi.

Then proceeding to mother Kousalya's apartment, Shri Rama after paying her obeisance said in sweet words, "O Mother, father has entrusted me with the charge of the forest region. It will be a very profitable experience for me to meet the sages and people of the forests and learn many life's missions and lessons from them. Do please give me permission to leave early." And he added, "There in the forests after living for a mere fourteen years, I shall return to you and the people of Ayodhya who love me so much."

Mother Kousalya opened her lips after a deep sigh and said, "Your father who loves you so dearly declared only the other day that he would anoint you as Yubaraja to succeed him, but at the next moment decreed for you a period of fourteen years' unbroken exile in the forests, I cannot see why. If you know do apprise me."

Queen Kousalya, says the poet, was in a difficult fix. If she opposed Shri Rama's exile in the forests, it would mean transgressing Dharma, as king Dasaratha's words would be superseded which she cannot do, and on the other hand, if she agreed in the proposal it would inflict punishment on her darling son Shri Rama. Says the poet:

धरम सनेह उभयमति घेरी। भइ गति सांप छछुन्दर केरी।।
राखउँ सुतहिं करउँ अनुरोधू। धरम जाइ अरुबंधु बिरोधू।।

While mother Kousalya was thus engaged in discussion with Shri Rama with a heavy heart, Shri Sita on hearing about the decree of king Dasaratha to give a fourteen years' exile in the forests to Shri Rama came to mother Kousalya to unburden her heavy heart of sorrow.

Shri Sita after bowing down to mother Kousalya humbly submitted to her, “If what I hear of the King’s decree about exile is true, I may be permitted to be near my Lord, in the forest to serve him uninterruptedly.”

Shri Rama turned to mother Kousalya and mentioned in detail all the trials and tribulations a tender young girl of Shri Sita’s upbringing will have to face in the deep forests full of thorny bushes all around, no thoroughfare to move on and the fierce animals and tribals to face, hills and mountains to cross on the way, spend nights under trees on bare ground, fruits and roots of trees to satisfy hunger with.

Shri Rama further spoke to her, “For the tender Swan of Mansarobar lake that Shri Sita is to expect to manage like the crane of the sea would be next to impossible. So, for her the best would be to stay back at home and await my return and Lakshmana’s from exile which will pass off quickly no doubt, and be able to serve father and mothers-in-law who are growing old and weak.” He added, “There is no righteousness (Dharma) greater than that for a married lady.”

Shri Sita later submitted to mother Kousalya, “Mother, my Lord, Shri Rama, has explained what will be truly beneficial for me and that I must stay back and take care of my elderly father and mothers-in-law. I am not able to see eye to eye with that.”

“But”, Shri Sita continued, “for the wife the absence of the husband would reduce the worth of Swarga (Heaven) to that of hell (Narka).” In the words of the poet:

तनु धनु धामु धरनि पुर राजू। पति बिहीन सबु सोकु समाजू।।

“For want of the consort her beauteous body, wealth and palatial building, power to wield will turn into painful elements only.”

Shri Sita continued in the words of the poet:

खग मृग परिजन नगरु बनु, बलकल बिमल दुकूल।
नाथ साथ सुर सदन सम, परनसाल सुख मूल।।

“On the other hand, if I be able to watch my Lord’s lotus feet being near him I shall deem the fruits of forest as Nectar of Heaven, the hills and mountains as towering buildings of Ayodhya in the forest, and I shall remain content always day and night. The joys of my Lord's company will beat all the trials and tribulations of forest life put together."

Shri Rama understood the deep seated feelings of Shri Sita and replied, "Do not grieve so much, O dear Sita, do come with me to the forest on exile. I shall take care of your worries there."

Then, mother Kousalya blessed Shri Sita and allowed her to be near Shri Rama to be able to serve in the forest.

At this juncture, when brother Lakshmana came to know of the developments that Shri Rama accompanied by Sita would leave for the forest, he became impatient to accompany brother Shri Rama to the forest and coming to where Shri Rama was, laid himself down at his feet and taking hold of his lotus feet urged, "You are my Lord, O Brother, do condescend to take me with you to be of service to you. Otherwise, your separation will break my heart! I do not know anyone other than you not even father, mother and preceptor."

Shri Rama looked at brother Lakshmana with love filled eyes and said, "O dear brother Lakshmana, you know Bharata is at the moment away from Ayodhya. In the circumstances, it would behove you to be near to our aged parents, revered Guru and the dear friends and kindly inhabitants of Ayodhya. Do please remain back and be of comfort to the entire people of Ayodhya who are so dear to us."

Lakshmana further pleaded saying, "You are my life's source and without you I shall drop down dead. If I have devoted myself wholeheartedly to your service can you desert me and leave for the forest without me?"

Shri Rama realised the deep seated love of brother Lakshmana and replied saying in the words of the poet:

मागहु बिदा मातु सन जाई। आवहु बेग चलहु बन भाई।।

"Go and seek permission of mother Sumitra so that you too can go with us to the forest if permitted."

And in response to son Lakshmana's request mother Sumitra replied saying:

जौं तो सोय रामु बन जाइ। अबध तुम्हार काज कछु नाईं।।

"If Sita and Rama are proceeding to the forest, you, son, have nothing to do at Ayodhya." And further she advised son Lakshmana as in the words of the poet:

तुम्ह कहुं बन सब भांति सुपासू। संग पितु मातु राम सिय जासू।।
जेहि न राम बन लहहि कलेसू। सुत सोइ करेहु इहहि उपदेसू।।

"Do all that is necessary so that Shri Rama does not have to take pains for them." After bowing to mother Sumitra, Lakshmana proceeded to father king Dasaratha's apartment together with Shri Rama. Counsellor Sumantra helped king Dasaratha to sit up. Both sons, Shri Rama and Lakshmana, together with Shri Sita all bowed to father respectfully. Seeing all of them together king Dasaratha was merged in great sorrow knowing that they were set on their way to the forest together.

Immersed in great sorrow, king Dasaratha was not able to speak a single word, as in the words of the poet — "hopeless grief is passionless".

Then bowing to the king again Shri Rama begged permission for all of them to be allowed to proceed to the forest. Then the king got them seated close to him and said: "Man is destined to get what he deserves on the basis of his deeds good or bad. But sometimes, due to God's ordains for the vile deed of someone else another suffers the bad results. God's ways sometimes appear to be wonderful." In the words of the poet:

और करे अपराध कोउ, और पाउ फल भोगु।
अति बिचित्र भगवंत गति, कौ जग जाने जोगु।।

Then, Shri Rama sent for the servants and maidservants who used to serve him in the palace apartments and begged Guru Vasistha to take care of them in his absence like their parents.

And addressing all present, begged them to be of good service to the ageing king in order to keep him happy and contented in his absence. In the words of the poet:

दासी दास बोलाइ बहोरी। गुरहि सौंपि बोले कर जोरी।
सब कै सार संभार गोसांइ। करबि जनक जननी की नाईं।।

At that juncture, mother Kaikeyi produced the wearing apparels and attires suitable for youthful "Tapas" and "Tapaswins" and asked Shri Rama, Shri Sita and Lakshmana to don themselves in the apparels before leaving for the forest. They readily took the garments and gladly donned themselves in them.

King Dasaratha asked Sumantra to accompany the princes and Shri Sita and advised him to bring them after three to four days' sojourn in the forests. He added saying "Even if the boys make delay to return try to bring Shri Sita back soon which will save my life from dwindling to death."

People, young and old, men and women, followed the princes and Shri Sita's chariot determined not to leave their company. They followed the chariot in a large number without tiring till the chariot and the Ayodhya residents reached Sringaberapura village or river Ganges. All had a night's rest there except Lakshmana who resolved to keep awake to provide guard to Shri Rama and Shri Sita during their sleep till they returned to Ayodhya.

When they got up at dawn before the Ayodhya residents got up Shri Rama advised Sumantra to "drive the chariot irregularly so that the followers will not be able to notice the wheel mark on the way. Otherwise, they cannot be prevented from following the chariot", Shri Rama said.

Next morning the Ayodhya residents were late in getting up from sleep and after ablutions in the river when they failed to find the wheel track of the chariot they were at a loss what to do. They bewailed the break in the company of their dear Shri Rama, and were forced to retrace their steps to Ayodhya.

CHAPTER V

SRINGABERAPURA

After performing ablutions Shri Rama who treated counsellor Sumantra as respectfully as father king Dasaratha, paid obeisance to him and in sweet words requested him to return to Ayodhya with the chariot and inform the king that according to the promise made we would spend the period of fourteen years in the forest and return thereafter by all means. Shri Rama added as in the words of the poet:

धरम न दूसर सत्य समाना।।

"Nothing other than Truth was as great as Righteousness can be, so we shall adhere to truth in all our lives' path; you kindly see that father and mothers and the residents of Ayodhya do not steep themselves in sorrow on our account — assure them that our love and respect will always be with them." So saying he bade farewell to Sumantra to return to Ayodhya.

Sumantra repeated king Dasaratha's advice to bring back Shri Sita if the boys would delay their return but Shri Sita's words convinced him that she cannot leave Shri Rama's side for she said as in the words of the poet:

"Can ever the shadow be separated from the body and the moonlight from the moon? So, my return leaving the brothers in the forest is not possible. Do please explain to all concerned at Ayodhya."

On the way, they had to cross river Ganges. The boatman would not allow Shri Rama to board the boat without first allowing his feet to be washed. "For", said the boatman, "he had heard that with the touch of Shri Rama's feet, a piece of boulder turned into a living damsel. My boat, made of wood, is softer than boulder. So, it would easily turn into damsel and then my earning would cease leaving me in helpless condition."

Shri Rama smiled a genial and understanding smile and allowed his feet to be washed by the boatman before boarding the boat.

On crossing over to the other side when Shri Sita offered the boatman her diamond ring as his wages, the boatman said as in the words of the poet:

फिरती बार नाथ मोहि देवा। सो प्रसादु मैं सिर धरि लेवा।।

"When after completing your exile in the forest you return this way whatever reward you offer O My Lord, I shall accept with pleasure." Shri Rama understood the heart's desire of the boatman and smiled and blessed him before proceeding further with Shri Sita and Lakshmana. In the core of his heart the understanding Nishada had was — when after completion of his life span he would return to his real home, whatever reward he would deserve from the Almighty he would gladly accept.

On the way, when Shri Rama, Shri Sita and Lakshmana reached Prayag where the three sacred rivers Ganges, Yamuna and Saraswati meet, Shri Rama recounted the sacred merits of the 'Sangam' or meeting point of the three rivers for Shri Sita and Lakshmana's benefit.

Crossing river Ganges, Shri Rama reached the hermitage of sage Varadwaja. Staying for the night with the great sage in his hermitage, Shri Rama, Shri Sita and Lakshmana after their ablutions proceeded after bowing to the sage early following morning.

Not only the residents of the wayside villages, the wayfarers and the birds and beasts of the forest all who came across the princes and Shri Sita were charmed by their noble and polite behaviour and sweet words but coming to know of the exile expressed their discontent, grief and sympathies with the princes and Shri Sita.

When before proceeding further into the forest region, Shri Rama bowed to river Ganges for her blessings and turned to Nishada Guha, thanked him for his help and bade him farewell, Guha humbly implored, "O Lord, I intend to accompany you from forest to forest for some distance in order to set up leaf huts in every new place for your stay and help you in other ways. Thereafter, when you no more need my services I may be relieved to return."

Proceeding further they reached Prayag where the three sacred rivers Ganges, Yamuna and Saraswati mingle into one and the confluence is taken as a sacred spot. The great sage Varadwaja had his hermitage nearabout where Shri Rama, Lakshmana and Shri Sita met the sage and stayed for the night in the hermitage. Sage Varadwaja was highly pleased to offer them fruits of the forest for food and milk for dinner.

Sage Varadwaja was highly pleased to have got them as guests and expressed his life's experience as in the words of the poet:

करम बचन मन छाड़ि छलु, जब लगि जनुन तुम्हार।
तब लगि सुखु सपनेहुं नहीं, किए कोटि उपचार।।

"So long as man is not able to abandon fraud and engage with deep sincerity in love-devotion of God, the rituals however great in number will not be of any avail in realising Him."

Such discussions with sages were highly delightful to Shri Rama in the forest. In their own way, the villagers and wayfarers in the forest held that the creator who had made Kalpataru tree foliageless and the vast stretch of sea water salty must have caused exile in forests to the tender aged Shri Rama, Lakshmana and Shri Sita. In the words of the poet:

रूख कलपतरू सागर खारा। तेहिं पठए बनु राजकुमारा।।
जौ जगदीस इन्हहिं बन दीन्हा। कस न सुमन मय मारगु कीन्हा।।

"If God ordained exile in forest for these youngsters, why would he not at the same time make the ground soft as flowers for them to tread on?"

Thus, proceeding onwards Shri Rama, Lakshmana and Shri Sita reached the hermitage of sage Valmiki. Seeing the hermitage area clean and attractive with creepers and flowers Shri Rama, Lakshmana and Shri Sita were immensely happy.

Sage Valmiki in the fullness of his heart recounted where Shri Rama should stay in course of his journeys. The one that is emphasized in the list of places given by sage Valmiki is "the hearts of those who have discarded lust, ire, attachment, greed and power are for you to reside, I suggest."

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डा. डिल्ली रमण रेग्मी
कल्याणी रेग्मी स्मारक
पुस्तकालय

"Whose only shelter is your grace, who treats all alike both friend and foe, looks upon others' consorts as mother, happy at the prosperity of others and sorry for their adversity, forsaking clan, family, home and hearth whose only attention is on you and you alone, make that place your residence", concluded the sage.

Shri Rama was well pleased and said, "I shall follow all that you mentioned. Now, O great sage, please tell me of the places in the forest which I shall prefer to visit during my sojourn."

The sage mentioned at length the merits of "Chitrakuta" which he recommended for the purpose on the way. Many great sages are residing in the area because of its salubrious climate and beautiful landscape with rivulets crossing the area in their course to join rivers Ganges and Yamuna.

CHAPTER VI

CHITRAKUTA

Later when Shri Rama, Shri Sita and Lakshmana reached Chitrakuta and the news reached the sages and "Tapas" in their hermitages around the place, they came over to where Shri Rama, Lakshmana and Shri Sita stayed in leaf huts put up for them by Guha, the Nishada, and his helpers.

Kol, Kirata and other tribals, males and females, came over to pay their homage to the visitors with gifts of sweet potatoes and other edible fruits and roots of the forest.

On the other hand, when Sumantra the king's counsellor having failed to persuade Shri Rama, Lakshmana and Shri Sita to return with him in the chariot in which they were brought, returned to Ayodhya alone and on hearing that they proceeded onwards into the forest, king Dasaratha felt like a stab to his heart and suffered great pain.

Not only the king, all the residents of Ayodhya missed Shri Rama, Lakshmana and Shri Sita deeply. They wailed being visibly moved by great sorrow.

In the Ayodhya palace, there was a deep shadow of sorrow enveloping the king and all other inmates. The king had given up food since departure of Shri Rama, Shri Sita and Lakshmana. He became deeply sorry repeating "Shri Rama, Siya and Raghu Rou" with broken sobs.

Sumantra recounted all that Shri Rama had begged of the king and of others to bless him, Shri Sita and Lakshmana in order to safely return to Ayodhya after the exile in the forest. He had a word for everyone, Guru Vasistha, all the mothers, all inmates of the palace including the helpers, servants and maids.

The pain of separation of the darling sons and Shri Sita came in increasing waves as the king wailed saying:

हा रघुनंदन प्रान पिरीते। तुम्ह बिनु जिअत बहुत दिन बीते।।
हा जानकी लखन हा रघुबर। हा पित हित चित चातक जलधर।।

The king wailed loudly for the sons Shri Rama and Shri Lakshmana and Shri Sita in ever increasing measure till at last in the words of the poet:

राम राम कहि राम कहि, राम राम कहि राम।
तनु परिहरि रघुबर बिरहु, राउ गयउ सुरधाम।।

Bewailing the names of Shri Rama again, again and over again king Dasaratha was not able to sustain himself and breathed his last and left for the other world, Heaven.

The entire Ayodhya residents steeped in the greatest of sorrows bewailed the loss of the great king Dasaratha in demise and for the absence of Shri Rama, Lakshmana and Shri Sita. Everyone abused in harsh words queen Kaikeyi whom they called the root of the great evil that had overtaken Ayodhya, including every single resident, men and women, rich and poor, great and small.

Sage Vasistha tried to console all with all the efforts at his command. With the help of others he got a wooden boat to be prepared, filled with oil and put the king's corpse in it for preservation till cremation. He sent a fast moving chariot to Kekaya, where in the maternal father's house was Bharata, with the only message "Guru Vasistha wants you back at Ayodhya post-haste with the least possible delay." He did not give any indication of the fateful developments that had overtaken the Ayodhya Royalty.

On getting Guru's call for immediate return from the messenger who had no other message to deliver, Bharata started post-haste and reached Ayodhya, in the words of the poet, "at wind's speed".

On entering Ayodhya city Bharata noticed everyone was looking pale and sorrowful, mute and averting look and conversation.

Thus, when Bharata reached the palace and went into his apartment, only mother Kaikeyi was found to be cheerful. She asked about her parents. "They are all well", quipped Bharata.

Then she added, "I had arranged everything with the help of Manthara but bad luck stood in the way, your father suddenly breathed his last."

On hearing the sad news, Bharata wailed aloud, "Father, O Father, where have you gone?" and he fell down on the ground unable to stand on his legs.

And, further hearing that Shri Rama had proceeded into the forest on exile Bharata became sorrow-struck with hopeless grief which made him mute.

In the meantime, mother Kaikeyi put in, "Your father had earned all the righteous merits he deserved and so he does not deserve to be bereaved. On death because of his merits he had departed for Heaven. That is why he is not to be bereaved. So, do not bewail him."

On learning everything Shri Bharata got terribly annoyed and angry. He flared up and quipped at mother Kaikeyi, "My father was simple and righteous person. He could not divine your vile intent. On the other hand, there is no one on earth who opposes Shri Rama."

Then, Bharata left for mother Kousalya's apartment to meet her. On noticing Bharata, mother Kousalya got up to clasp him but fell down not being able to control her movements. When she sat up aided by Bharata, he asked "where are my father and brother Shri Rama and Lakshmana gone?" And Bharata asked nobody in particular, "Why was mother Kaikeyi born on earth? If born why did not she remain barren?"

And Bharata added, "I know father is no longer in life. He has repaired to heaven. I am the cause of all the villainy." And he added further, "If I had any idea in me in support thereof, let all the sins thereof accrue to me, O God."

Mother Kousalya then said, "I know Bharata how much Shri Rama loves you in all respects and how much you love him in return. I can say with all the force at my command that you had no concern with the decision to send Rama on exile and to anoint you as Yubaraja. It may be all due to desire of the Almighty."

Sage Vasistha reached the palace, called on Bharata in mother Kousalya's apartment and in the words of the poet expressed:

सुनहु भरत भाबी प्रबल, बिलखि कहेउ मुनि नाथ।
हानि लाभ जीवन मरन, जस अपजस बिधि हाथ।।

"Life and death, gain and loss, praise and ill-repute are all in the hands of the Almighty to dispense. No one does either this or that for anybody on earth. It all depends on the deeds of man, good or bad."

On the other hand, continued sage Vasistha as in the poet's words, "it is correct to hold that king Dasaratha is not worthy of bereavement. For, on principle, the following only are fit to be bereaved on demise: (a) the Brahmin ignorant of the Vedas, engrossed in earthly matters, (b) the king who is bereft of principles of equity and does not treat his subjects as dear as his own life, (c) the friend who though wealthy is miser and never helps his friend in need, (d) the wife who dupes her consort in all matters and is quarrelsome and vile, (e) the householder who forgets his duties to the other classes who depend on his charity, (f) the man who talks ill of others behind their back."

On the other hand according to the prevailing practice men bereave the deceased who was good, noble, helpful to others in life whether it was his ordained clan or caste duty or not.

This is dependent on the prevailing practice but on principle if one has performed his duties to others, and helped the deserving out of his own resources, there should not be any cause for remorse, and so bereavement is not called for as observed by sage Vasistha quoting the scripture.

In the case of king Dasaratha, as held by scriptures because king Dasaratha was not only conscious of his duties but also performed them faithfully as king towards the subjects, he is not fit to be bereaved.

Bharata begged of all the elderly learned and experienced well-wishers of the Ayodhya Royal Family to advise him in his great calamity when father the king had departed on death, brothers Shri Rama and Lakshmana and Shri Sita are on exile in the forest. He added, "I am sorrow-steeped and the scriptures say that the person in sorrow should be helped with advice which he will be able to follow and practise."

And Bharata went on lamenting his life to be bare without Shri Rama, Lakshmana and Shri Sita. He begged of all to advise him to proceed and meet all the three in the forest and join them in exile, not to be involved in the worries of administration of Ayodhya. And he added, "that only will be fruitful action on my part. If you put care of Ayodhya on me it will be a bad day for Ayodhya and its residents."

Bharata continued, "Even the great sage Vasistha, our preceptor, advises me to be anointed as "Yubaraja", for only when bad times goad a man well-wishers, also preceptor Vasistha cannot advise otherwise. I am not afraid of declining all that, my only fear is the trials and tribulations of Shri Rama, Lakshmana and Shri Sita while wandering in the forest on exile; Lakshmana is fortunate for his life is dedicated to the service of Shri Rama. On the other hand I was born to bring banishment to Shri Rama, Lakshmana and Shri Sita to the forests." And he concluded, "Let me make it clear to all my life's great sorrow will not abate before I meet Shri Rama, Lakshmana and Shri Sita in the forest. My only desire is to leave for the forest the first thing in the morning tomorrow. And I am sure Shri Rama will excuse me for all that I have brought to him as soon as he sees me there. I beg of all of you to send me to Shri Rama to bring him, Lakshmana and Shri Sita back to Ayodhya from the forest."

Ayodhya residents were not only happy to hear that Shri Bharata would go to the forest to meet Shri Rama, Lakshmana and Shri Sita and persuade them to come back to Ayodhya, but those of them who were able to proceed with him prepared to accompany in suitable carriages and palanquins, etc.

The procession of Ayodhya residents started with the chariot of preceptor Vasistha and Bharata followed by those of the queens and respectable senior citizens with a large number of people going in carts and on foot. All were overjoyed with the prospect of meeting Shri Rama, Lakshmana and Shri Sita whom they had missed for many many days. Seeing that mother Kousalya alighted from the chariot and offered that to eldery persons going on foot, other queens, Bharata and Satrughna and noblemen followed her example and offered their chariots to persons who were trying to cope with the task of keeping pace with others on the go.

Bharata and Satrughna continued journey by chariot not to get delayed on the way. At Sringaberapura village, Nishada Guha, friend of Shri Rama, heard in advance of the approaching procession of Ayodhya residents bent upon proceeding to where Shri Rama, Lakshmana and Shri Sita were in the forest.

Guha wondered what might be Shri Bharata's intention to meet Shri Rama with the hordes of people and soldiers of Ayodhya. He asked all his clansmen to conceal the boats and be ready to oppose the soldiers if need be for the safety of Shri Rama, Lakshmana and Shri Sita. "To court death for such a purpose on the banks of the sacred Ganges would mean great good luck for all of them", he explained, and added, "in any case, we shall try to prevent Bharata and his army to proceed further into the forest for who knows what their intention may be."

Guha's followers promised that if necessary they would attack the army of Bharata so that it would be devoid of heroes and horses and elephants.

One of the elderly men of Guha's clan said, "I feel that Bharata is going to meet Shri Rama in order to beg excuse of him and so it will be wise for us to meet Bharata as friends to know his mind. The signs show that there is not going to be a dispute between Shri Rama and Shri Bharata." Guha expressed his agreement with this view of the old man and said "better we wait and see and be not hasty in our decision." In the words of the poet:

सुनि गुह कहइ नीक कहि बूढ़ा, सहसा करि पछिताहिं बिमूढ़ा।

When Shri Bharata and sage Vasistha followed by Ayodhya residents came near, Guha proceeded and met them and bowed before sage Vasistha. The sage knew him as friend to Shri Rama and introduced him to Bharata as such.

Bharata alighted from the chariot and met Guha who bowed before him in deep respectful manner. Shri Bharata picked Guha up and embraced him out of love as brother Shri Rama's well-wisher and friend.

Helped by Guha Shri Bharata visited all the spots where Shri Rama, Lakshmana and Shri Sita took rest, slept for the night, had food and discussion with sages on the way.

All along on the way, Shri Bharata, Guru Vasistha and elderly Brahmanas and pundits were discussing and recalling Shri Rama's merits and qualities of compassion. In the words of the poet:

राम जनमि जग कीन्ह उजागर। रूप सील सुख सब गुन सागर।।
पुरजन परिजन गुर पितु माता। राम सुभाउ सबहि सुखदाता।।

"By incarnating on earth Shri Rama has hallowed the entire earth. By his love-soaked, polite and kind words everyone from highest to the lowest loved him with all his heart, Guru Vasistha, parents and elders, the common mass, learned and wise all he loved and all loved him equally without exception."

Shri Bharata in discussion with Guha mentioned of himself as in the words of the poet:

मैं धिग धिग अघ उदधि अभागी। सबु उतपात मयउ जेहि लागी।।
कुल कलंकु करि सृजेउ बिधाता। सांइदोह मोहि कीन्ह कुमाता।।

"Fie me, the sea of sins, for whom all the doleful incidents have overtaken Ayodhya, not only the Royal Family but the entire people of the domain all of whom loved Shri Rama and Shri Rama loved them as much if not more dearly."

As evening advanced, the entire entourage had sweet potatoes for dinner as provided by Nishada Guha and his followers and slept on bare ground covered with "Kusha" grass cuttings heaped as bed. The people were barely asleep when at dawn, they all got up along with Shri Bharata for ablutions and to get ready to start proceeding again with Guha as guide. They were not far from Chitrakuta where they arrived by noon.

From a distance, Guha pointed out the hillock on top of which under a large spreading banyan tree on a dwarf platform sat Shri Rama and Shri Sita surrounded by sages and conversed with them on Vedas, Scriptures and Puranas.

Following Guha's directions, Bharata and party went up the hillock eager to meet Shri Rama, Lakshmana and Shri Sita in the leaf hut erected there for them by Guha.

Surrounded by sages Shri Rama , Lakshmana and Shri Sita sat on the altar. Following Guha's lead Shri Bharata approached with heart full of love-devotion for Shri Rama. Along with younger brother Satrughna Bharata proceeded and bowed to Shri Sita. Hearts being full of love for one another none could utter a word.

At this juncture, Guha proceeded and mentioned to Shri Lakshmana that accompanied by Guru Vasistha all the mothers and many residents of Ayodhya had come to meet Shri Rama and

Shri Sita in the forest as they could not tolerate separation from them for so long. Bharata would like to meet them at the earliest wherever you feel appropriate.

Shri Rama first met mother Kaikeyi. Then, he and Lakshmana met Guru Vasistha and then in his anxiety to meet brother Bharata he got up careless of his upper garments and the bow and arrows trailing behind. When Bharata came near each was gazing at the other, the mixed feeling of love and sorrow welling up in their hearts.

The deep love and sorrow that welled up together in the hearts of both Shri Rama and Shri Bharata made them speechless for the moment.

Shri Rama first met mother Kaikeyi, then Kousalya and then Sumitra in that order. Shri Rama begged them to come to the hermitage under the tree on top of the dwarf hillock.

The meeting of brother Bharata with Shri Rama, Lakshmana and Shri Sita was most touching. Shri Lakshmana led the elders to where Shri Rama's leaf huts were standing. In the rear were Shri Bharata, Lakshmana and Shri Rama. Shri Sita met all the mothers-in-law and consort of Guru Vasistha who had accompanied all of them.

All of them remembered late king Dasaratha and paid due homage and respect to his beloved memory. In ceaseless conversation days and nights glided past. No one thought of leaving Chitrakuta for Ayodhya. The forest fruits and roots were like nectar to all of them. Everyone was thinking of Shri Rama's being anointed as Yubaraja, but none could think how to pose the point.

After great deal of consideration, sage Vasistha said, "I have a suggestion for consideration of all. In times of great disaster the wise have advised to give up half." In the words of the poet:

सकुचहुं तात कहत एक बाता। अरध तजहिं बुध सरबस जाता।।
तुम्ह कानन गवनउ दोउ भाई। फेरिहिं लखन सीय रघुराई।।
सुनि सुबचन हरषे दोउ भ्राता। भै प्रमोद परिपूरन गाता।।

Guru Vasistha then said, "I am shy of making suggestion which is uppermost in my mind. In times of great disaster to avoid total loss, the wise offer to surrender half. In that view, I say, if instead, you two brothers, Bharata and Satrughna, would offer to spare yourselves to take up exile in place of Shri Rama, Lakshmana and Shri Sita, and they — Shri Rama, Lakshmana and Shri Sita return to Ayodhya, it may solve the problem." Brothers Bharata and Satrughna were happy on hearing Guru Vasistha's advice and readily agreed to take up the exile. Shri Bharata said, "I am prepared for more than that. I am prepared to take up the exile for whole life if need be, let my brothers Shri Rama and Lakshmana and Shri Sita return to Ayodhya forthwith."

There was some discussion on this suggestion of Guru Vasistha in the assembly of the Ayodhya residents and others assembled there and Shri Bharata in response said, "I am prepared to act as you bid with a free and frank mind. And, I give this suggestion too for your consideration. Let me and Satrughna proceed to the forest and you and Lakshmana and Shri Sita return to Ayodhya, or if you would so like let myself, Lakshmana and Satrughna proceed on the exile and you and Shri Sita go back to Ayodhya. In any case, the people of Ayodhya want you amidst them. They cannot tolerate long separation from you.

"Or else as the articles of Abhiseka for anointing have been brought with us and in presence of Guru Vasistha and other sages of the forests and with their help and direction let your Abhiseka be performed in the forest and thereafter you choose any one of us and Shri Sita to be with you for the exile period."

And concluding Shri Bharata said as in the words of the poet:

प्रभु प्रसन्न मन सकुच तजि, जो जेहि आयसु देव।
सो सिर धरि धरि करिहि सबु, मिटहि अनट अवेरव।।

"O Lord do kindly give directions as to the action to be taken without let and hinderance", urged Shri Bharata. Everyone present was happy with this suggestion of Shri Bharata, but considering the peculiar position which Ayodhya was in at the moment, no one could express any definite opinion as to what step should be adopted by Shri Rama, and what else by the other brothers. In the words of the poet:

समुझि अबध असमंजस दोउ।
चलिअ कि रहिअ न कह कछु कोउ।।

In other words, in the peculiar situation, on both views as to whether Shri Rama should return to Ayodhya or proceed on the exile, no one could express one way or the other.

Then a couple of secret service men were deputed as messengers by Shri Rama to find out the desire of the remaining Ayodhya residents in the matter. They found the position as at Chitrakuta and proceeded to Kosala and informed Raja Janaka, Shri Sita's father.

On learning the news from the messengers Raja Janaka left Janakpuri immediately and proceeded non-stop to Prayag on way to Chitrakuta. With a brief stop there for ablutions king Janaka proceeded to Chitrakuta.

At Chitrakuta all Ayodhya residents were happy to learn that king Janaka had arrived there. Only Shri Rama was not sure of the outcome of king Janaka's (his father-in-law) visit there. And mother Kaikeyi was in a quandary not being able to be sure that Shri Rama's exile would stand.

When both Royal family members of Ayodhya and Bideha came together all of them for the moment recalling late king Dasaratha became mum for some time. No one could utter a word even of welcome. They felt that even the beasts and birds of the jungle were sorrow-struck and had not touched food — what to speak of humans! In the words of the poet:

पसु खग मृग न कीन्ह आहारु।
प्रिय परिजन कर कौन बिचारु।।

"Out of great sorrow at the demise of king Dasaratha, even the animals and birds had renounced food, what to speak of relations and friends of the Royal families."

At this juncture, Shri Rama spoke to Guru Vasistha:

तब रघुनाथ कौसिकहिं कहेऊ।
नाथ कालि जल बिनु सबु रहेऊ।।

Sage Vasistha thanked Shri Rama and asked for collection of fruits and roots. Soon adequate quantity of sweet potatoes and other fruits and edible roots of the forest were heaped there by the forest dwellers who would not accept payment for that out of deep love for Shri Rama. The guests from Ayodhya and Bideha enjoyed that sitting under shady trees and liked the food as Nectar. Thus, they spent four days there bound by love of Shri Rama and king Janaka.

At this juncture king Janaka came to where the queen mothers stayed in the leaf huts.

Queen Sumitra in distress mentioned that the Almighty sometimes operates like a small child. In the words of the poet:

सुनि ससोच कह देवि सुमित्रा। बिधि गति बड़ि विपरीत बिचित्रा।
जो सृजि पालइ हटइ बहोरी। बाल केलि समबिधि गति भोरी।।

Queen Sumitra observed with doleful feeling, "The Almighty who creates the Universe with all the worlds and maintains them with delicate care, sometimes behaves like a child enjoying the plum, and throwing the seed as useless in sum."

Queen Kousalya also observed in the same vein. "It is Almighty who maintains the world", she said, "and gives good or bad fruits to humans as they would deserve which, when. If Shri Rama, Lakshmana and Sita proceed to the forest further on exile the result thereof may be good. I am worried about what would be Shri Bharata's condition thereby."

लखनु राम सिय जाहुं बन, भलपरिनाम न पोचु।
गहबरि हियं कह कौसिला, मोहि भरत कर सोचु।।
जानउ सदा भरत कुलदीपा। बार बार मोहि कहेउ महीपा।।

These words of mother Kousalya show clearly how dearly king Dasaratha used to love Bharata. As such he could not be expected to have planned with any motive to arrange for anointing Shri Rama as Yubaraja in the absence of Bharata from Ayodhya. We may recall here that queen Kaikeyi, mother of Bharata, had on the insinuation of vile Manthara pointed that out as a planned timing on the part of king Dasaratha to keep Shri Bharata out of the picture for all time. But considering the tradition of succession to the throne in the kingdom which in those times was invariably reserved for the first born, the eldest son, who in this case was Shri Rama, and not Bharata, there was no question of Bharata being considered for that position. The "Abhiseka" of Shri Rama was not going to ban Bharata's rightful claim in unholy manner.

Then with blessings of Guru Vasistha, king Janaka and mother of Shri Sita proceeded to meet Shri Rama, Lakshmana and Sita in their leaf huts. King Janaka was highly pleased to find daughter Sita in the garb of "Tapaswini", which matched the garb of Shri Rama as a "Tapas". In the words of the poet:

तापष बेष जनक सिय देखी। भयउ पेम परितोष बिषेखी।।
पुत्रि पबित्र किये कुल दोऊ। सुजस धवल जगु कह सबु कोऊ।।

In other words king Janaka was highly pleased to see daughter Sita in garb of "Tapaswini" and expressed his pleasure saying, "She has succeeded to sanctify both her father and father-in-law's clans. All people extol this on earth."

Thereafter, when Shri Sita expressed her desire to leave for the camp of mother Kousalya to render her service at night, king Janaka and mother of Shri Sita were very pleased to notice her affectionate conduct.

Before Shri Sita left for mother Kousalya's camp for the night, king Janaka spoke at length on the merits of Shri Bharata and concluding said as in the words of the poet:

भरतु अवधि सनेह ममता की।
जद्यपि राम सीम समता की।।

In other words, "Shri Rama's is the highest limit in politeness to all equally, Shri Bharata's is the limit of love to all."

Next morning, Shri Rama after ablutions called on Guru Vasistha, bowed and mentioned:

"Shri Bharata and all the mothers and Ayodhya residents who had come all the way to Chitrakuta were steeped in sorrow due to my exile in the forest. They and king Janaka and others from Bideha have spent many days now in the forest suffering all the privations here. Do kindly consider what step has to be taken in the circumstances."

Guru Vasistha in reply said to Rama, "They are all happy to be with you. They will be sorry to lose that opportunity." Guru Vasistha kept quiet thereafter and Shri Rama took leave of Guru Vasistha with that.

Thereafter, Guru Vasistha left for king Janaka's camp and after blessing him and informing Shri Rama's mind said, as in the words of the poet:

महाराज अब कीजिये सोई। सब कर धरम सहित हित होई।।

"O wise king, do in the circumstances consider what would solve the difficult situation in which both Ayodhya and Bideha residents find themselves—not able to leave Shri Rama in the forest nor allow Shri Rama to proceed on exile leaving behind all others."

आये इहां कीन्ह भल नाहीं।

King Janaka cogitated thus, "I am afraid, I have not been wise to have come here in such a time." And in the poet's words went on cogitating:

रामहिं राय कहेउ बन जाना। कीन्ह आपु प्रिय प्रेम प्रवाना।।
हम अब बन ते बनहि पठाई। प्रमुदित फिरब बिबेक बड़ाई।।

"King Dasaratha sent Shri Rama on exile and himself breathed his last to prove his great love for Shri Rama, but now I shall send Shri Rama from here to forest and myself return home to Bideha."

Then king Janaka maintaining his calm proceeded with others to Shri Bharata's camp to consult him.

King Janaka opened the topic saying in the words of the poet:

राम सत्यब्रत धरम रत सब कर सील सनेहु।
संकट सहत सकोच बस, कहिअ जो आयसु देहु।।

"Shri Rama is steadfast on truth, righteous in all respects, affectionate and polite to all alike." Shri Bharata became overcome with love for Shri Rama and said in the words of the poet:

प्रभु प्रिय पूज्य पिता सम आपू। कुल गुरु सम हितमायन बापू।।

"Shri Rama is as revered as father, as well meaning as or more than Guru Vasistha himself." He added, "Sage Viswamitra and the ministers are all wise. I pray to all to advise and give me guidance as I am inexperienced junior to all. Let me not talk like a senior, all of you do excuse if I do. All of you are fully aware of Shri Rama's bent of mind and adherence to truth. Let all of you consider and advise what to do in the circumstances."

After hearing Shri Bharata, king Janaka, sage Vasistha and Shri Bharata with others went to Shri Rama's camp.

All of them called upon goddess Saraswati to keep Shri Bharata's mind steady and not under influence of love for Shri Rama and others, otherwise the plan of events will get confused.

King Janaka said to Shri Rama, "O Shri Rama in the circumstances whatever direction you will give will be followed by one and all."

Shri Rama very politely replied, "In your august presence sir", he addressed king Janaka, "if I dictate directions it will be like a child giving advice to his father and preceptor. So, do consider what will be best for me and advise as you all consider in your wisdom."

Shri Bharata, then submitted, "I have all along followed your advice and direction, so is the attitude of all here to look up to you for guidance in all matters. What more can I say in the presence of seniors here like you?"

Shri Rama out of deep love for brother Bharata, taking hold of his hand drew him closer and got him seated near to himself.

In his discourse to Shri Bharata, Shri Rama pointed out, "It would be correct and beneficial to all to obey what father king Dasaratha had ordained for both of us — for you to take charge of the care of Ayodhya kingdom and people, and for me to take charge of the forest region in course of exile." And Shri Rama as a mark of blessing made over to Shri Bharata his wooden pair of footwear (Kathau). Shri Bharata gracefully received and put them on his head to carry on his way back to Ayodhya. Bharata considered one of them as protection to the kingdom and the other as protection to the people.

According to Shri Rama's direction Bharata commenced action by leaving for Ayodhya without delay. He begged leave of Shri Rama to start for Ayodhya along with brother Satrughna to take up the work as desired by Shri Rama. They also met Shri Sita and Shri Lakshmana and bowed to them and begged leave to depart for Ayodhya, and both Shri Rama and Lakshmana took leave of king Janaka and Guru Vasistha before proceeding further into the forest. Shri Rama and Lakshmana also bowed before the senior and wise Brahmanas who had come from Ayodhya to bid them adieu.

Shri Rama also bowed before mother Kaikeyi and took leave of her without any reservation. In the words of the poet:

भरत मातु पद बंदि प्रभु, सुचि सनेह मिलि भेंटि।
बिदा कीन्हि सजि पालकी, सकुचि सोच सब मेटि।।

So also all other mothers were taken leave of and put in suitable palanquins to return to Ayodhya.

Then Shri Rama, Lakshmana and Shri Sita bowed before Guru Vasistha and consort.

The sacred waters brought for "Abhiseka" of Shri Rama in the forest were put in the sacred well at Chitrakuta which was named as "Bharata Kupa" and is visited as a sacred spot at Chitrakuta even now.

Last of all Shri Rama bade adieu to his Nishada friend Guha, with love welling up in hearts of both.

Thereafter, Shri Rama, Shri Sita and Lakshmana sat for a long while under the Banyan tree and talked about all the friends who had come to visit them at Chitrakuta.

On their way back, the friends, relations, wise senior citizens, Guru Vasistha crossed rivers Yamuna, Ganges and Gomati. At the last crossing friend Guha made arrangement of food and refreshments for the returning party. They all reached Ayodhya on the fourth day.

The residents of Ayodhya remained happily at the instance of Guru Vasiṣtha remembering Shri Rama's love for them.

Shri Bharata then called all ministers and senior citizens and discussed with them about Ayodhya affairs. To younger brother Satrughna he gave special charge of the care of all the mothers.

With Guru Vasistha Shri Bharata had intimate discussions in which Bharata proposed that he would observe certain rules of conduct and putting Shri Rama's wooden "Paduka" on the "Sinhasana" or Royal throne as representing Shri Rama, Bharata himself observed "munibrata" or strict rules of the "Tapas", donning garments like Shri Rama in the forest, as in the words of the poet:

लखन राम सिय कानन बसही। भरत भबन बसि तब तनु कसही।

"As Shri Lakshmana, Rama and Sita lived in the forest so did Shri Bharata live at Ayodhya following strictly the "Tapas Rules" adopted by Shri Rama."

Shri Rama stayed for a few more days with Lakshmana and Shri Sita at Chitrakuta and then repaired to the hermitage of sage Atri in the vicinity of Chitrakuta with Shri Sita and Lakshmana. The wise sage was very happy to get Shri Rama and the others as guests. Shri Sita became very devoted to Shri Anasuya, consort of the sage, and from her got knowledge of practising love-devotion to God.

During their stay in Chitrakuta, Jayanta, son of Indra, being allured of Shri Sita and finding no other approach, in the garb of a crow picked Shri Sita's foot with its beak causing profuse flow of blood from the wound. Shri Rama took out his bow and shot an arrow to follow the crow. Finding it inexorable, Jayanta approached his father out of fear. Indra could gauge that it was the missile sent by Shri Rama because of misdemeanour of Jayanta. He asked his son to take shelter of Shri Rama and beg pardon of him.

Jayanta out of great fright begged Shri Rama's pardon. Though for Jayanta's misconduct, he deserved being beheaded, Shri Rama out of compassion removed one of Jayanta's eyes and left him one eyed after that. The deep compassion of Shri Rama is noticeable in this case. In the words of the poet:

कीन्ह मोहबस जद्यपि, तेहि कर बध उचित।
प्रभु छाड़िउ करि छोह, को क्रिपाल रघुबीर सम।।

In other words, although for his misconduct Jayanta deserved being beheaded, Shri Rama out of compassion let him go with a mere removal of one of his eyes, making him one eyed. It is rare to find example of such compassion anywhere else in the three worlds — Heaven, Earth and Nether World.

During their stay in the hermitage of sage Atri, Shri Sita had the opportunity to listen to words of advice from Anasuya, consort of the sage. Her advice covered some essential aspects of feminine good conduct as in the words of the poet:

धीरज धरम मित्र अरु नारी। आपद काल परखियेहि चारी।
बृद्ध रोग बस जड़ धन हीना। अंध बधिर क्रोधी अति दीना।।
ऐसेहि पति कर किए अपमाना। नारि पाव जमपुर दुख नाना।।
एकइ धरम एक ब्रत नेमा। काय बचन मन पति पद प्रेमा।।

In other words, Anasuya advised Shri Sita in the following words: "Patience, righteousness, friend and consort, the merit of these four is tested in times of distress. If they remain steady in such times they are to be taken as meritorious."

From sage Atri's hermitage after taking his permission, Shri Rama, Lakshmana and Shri Sita proceeded ahead in the forest and reaching the hermitage of sage Sarabhanga, they stayed there for a few days. There, Shri Rama met some other sages too and with all of them, he had discourses on love-devotion to the Almighty and His worship. After a couple of days' stay, Shri Rama proceeded forward in the forest.

On the way, was noticed heaps of bones scattered here and there and Shri Rama enquired of the sages accompanying them. He learnt from them that demons of the forest were in the habit of harassing the sages and in many cases devouring them. "The bones are the remains of the sages so devoured", they said. This pained Shri Rama and drew tears from his eyes and raising both his hands he made the vow then and there to free all the forests of such wicked demons. In the words of the poet:

निसिचर हीन मही करौं, भुज उठाइ प्रनु कीन्ह।
सकल मुनिन्ह के आश्रमहि जाइ जाइ सुख दीन्ह।।

In other words: On hearing from the sages about the unprecedented depredation of the demons Shri Rama made the vow raising his arms to heaven to rid the forests of the demons for the safety of the sages and other residents.

It may be observed here that this was as if repeated in the subsequent Dwapar Yuga by the then incarnation Shri Krishna in his declaration before Arjuna, the middle Pandava, in the midst of the Kurukhetra battle as in the words of the poet in the well-known sloka:

यदा यदाहि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारतः।
अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदात्मानं सृजाम्यहम्।।
परित्राणाय साधूनां विनाशाय च दुष्कृताम्।
धर्मसंस्थापनार्थाय संभवाभि युगे युगे।।

The essence of the above is same in sense and spirit as the vow made by Shri Rama referred to in the foregoing quotation.

While Shri Rama, Lakshmana and Shri Sita were proceeding ahead, sage Suthikshna, disciple of the great sage Agasti, on hearing of Shri Rama's visit ran and met him, bowed and begged to visit their hermitage. Shri Rama found sage Agasti completely soaked in his love-devotion.

CHAPTER VII

PANCHABATI (ABDUCTION OF SHRI SITA)

Shri Rama noticed sage Agasti from behind a tree singing Shri Rama's name and dancing to its tune. He was overwhelmed by the great sage's love-devotion and made himself appear on his chest in light and shade. As the sage was not able to discern Shri Rama in that form Shri Rama appeared with all his four arms and the sage recognising him bowed before the Lord rolling on the ground.

From there Shri Rama, Lakshmana and Shri Sita proceeded to the hermitage of sage Kumbhoja. Along with great sage Agasti other sages too came to his hermitage. There amid discourses, sage Agasti suggested that Shri Rama, Lakshmana and Shri Sita visit Panchabati in the Dandakaranya forest area. And following that, on the banks of Godavari river, in leaf huts Shri Rama, Lakshmana and Shri Sita stayed for some days. There, Gidharaj the king kite bird Jatayu devotee of Shri Rama met them with deep love-devotion.

In course of discourses with the sages Shri Lakshmana begged of Shri Rama to explain the relationship of the Almighty with the beings of earth. And, further too how the beings were enveloped in Illusion or "Maya".

Shri Rama briefly mentioned that as in the words of the poet:

मैं अरु मोर तोर ये माया। जेहि बस कीन्हे जीव निकाया।।

Being engrossed in Illusion or Maya all beings of earth are under the sway of selfish designs or Maya.

"The sense enemies and mind of man are agents of Illusion. On the one hand, they operate to keep man sorrow-stricken and under their spell and on the other enable man to realise the presence of the Almighty in all beings in equal measure."

Shri Rama explained the connection between God Almighty and beings of earth and thereafter proceeded to explain the ninefold way of Vakti. He mentioned "Nabadha Vakti" the details of which are given below:

They are (a) love and respect to sages and learned Brahmanas, (b) with devotion to meditate God Almighty, (c) service to elders including preceptor, parents and husband, (d) singing praise of God Almighty with love-devotion, (e) discarding lust, ire and other sense enemies from heart, (f) in words, deeds and thoughts completely absorbed in Almighty, (g) taking great pleasure to listen to the praise of Almighty, (h) words, deeds and thoughts free from desire and (i) deep devotion for Almighty.

At that juncture Srupanakha, sister of Ravana, demon king of Lanka, visited Panchabati forests which were under the sway of Ravana as his overseas domain. There, on seeing Shri Rama and Lakshmana and being charmed by their beauty and personality she begged Shri Rama to possess her in view of her charm. But Shri Rama pointed at brother Lakshmana adding that he was still young. When Srupanakha approached Shri Lakshmana again and again, out of disgust he made her bereft of nose and ears and that disfigured her. Srupanakha ran to her brother Ravana then on sojourn in Panchabati and showed her mutilated condition. Ravana asked his demon agents, Khara and Dushana, to teach the "Tapas boys" (Shri Rama and Lakshmana) a good lesson without delay.

At this stage, Shri Rama called upon brother Lakshmana to go with Shri Sita into the mountain cave, "for the demons are coming in large number to fight and capture us", he said.

When the demons spied Shri Rama they moved towards him and demanded of him, saying "produce your consort whom you have concealed somewhere and go back home in life." One of them said, "how graceful is the prince. Such beautiful persons are not fit to be put to death." In the words of the poet he said:

जद्यपि भगिनी कीन्ह कुरुपा। बध लायक नहिं पुरुष अनूपा।।
देहु तुरत निज नारि भुराई। जीवत भवन जाहु दौ भाई।।

"Although, you have disfigured our sister Srupanakha, for your graceful appearance you are not fit to be slain. Surrender your wife to us and go back home both of you."

When one of the demons spoke to Shri Rama accordingly he replied saying — in the words of the poet:

हम छत्री मृगया बन करही। तुम्ह से मृग खल खोजतफिर रही।।
रिपु बलवंत देखि नहिं डरहीं। एक बार कालहु सन लरही।।

"I belong to Khatriya (warrior) race and I am in search of vile demons like you. If you so desire you may test your ability by giving "death" a fight. Though I am ready to destroy the demons, I am out to protect the sages and learned harmless persons living here. If you are afraid better turn back and go home. I do not fight persons who run away in fright."

Hearing these words of Shri Rama, Khara and Dushana became very annoyed. But, to no purpose. Shri Rama easily countered all the weapons used by the demons against him as mere til seed missiles. In the words of the poet:

तिन्ह के आयुध तिल सम, करि काटे रघुबीर।।

This proved that Shri Rama was not only an adept in warfare, but immeasurably brave and fearless.

Noticing their severe reverses Khara, Dushana and Trisira the three leaders of the demons left the battlefield and ran away.

On the victory of Shri Rama over the demons not only the gods of heaven, but the sages and "tapas" of the forest and the simple forest residents breathed a sigh of relief for the reverses of their enemies, the demons who oppressed and devoured them in their hermitages and homes.

Then Shri Lakshmana accompanied by Shri Sita came out from the mountain cave. Shri Rama embraced brother Lakshmana in appreciation. Thereafter the demons did not dare to disturb them.

Shri Rama stayed in Panchabati in leaf sheds for some more days during which he had discourses with sages and wise learned men who called on him,

On the other hand, Srupanakha on reaching brother Ravana on sojourn in Dandak forest area of Panchabati at that time for the reverses suffered by the demons, rebuked brother Ravana saying, "You are in unbroken sleep with hard drink; being a king you are unprincipled which is like being rich without righteousness, doing righteous deeds without surrendering their fruits to God, without conscience to acquire knowledge which becomes futile in the end." And concluding said as in the words of the poet:

रिपु रुंज पावक पाप प्रभुहि गनिअ न छोट करि।

In other words she said, "Never count as insignificant the enemy, illness, small fire, crime and snake" and wailed aloud to attract the attention of Ravana, her brother and pleaded with him to see what disgraceful condition she has been reduced to by the enemy and wailed in the very assembly of Ravana with large number of persons present.

Ravana consoled his sister Srupanakha and assured to take ample revenge for all that and asked her to return home. He took careful stock of the position then and concluded saying as in the words of the poet:

सुर नर असुर नाग खष माहिं। मोर अनुचर कह कोउ नाहीं।।
खरदूषण मोहि सम बलवंता। तिन्हहु को मारइ बिनु भगवंता।।
सुर रंजन भंजन महि भारा। जो भगवंत लीन्ह अवतारा।।

"In the gods and humans, demons and birds I have my followers everywhere obedient to me; Khara and Dushana, the demons, are as mighteous as I myself. Who other than Almighty God could have caused all of them to meet their end? He, God Almighty has incarnated to stop oppression to the righteous and wise people, sages and Gods. I shall pick up enmity with him and to his arrows I shall incur demise and earn salvation at his hands from mundane existence."

And further — "I shall have to die one day. As I cannot take up the other way of meditation and prayer to God being of inferior knowledge and love-devotion to God, I shall try to defeat the princes in battle and carry away Shri Sita wife to Shri Rama to incur their wrath. And, if I succumb to Shri Rama's shaft I shall gain my desired end of salvation thereby."

Accordingly, Ravana planned in consultation with Maricha another accomplice of his whom he persuaded to adopt the garb of a golden deer and appear before Shri Rama and Shri Sita in their leaf hut camp in the forest. Shri Sita will certainly ask to capture the golden deer for her.

And the plan succeeded as Shri Sita on seeing the golden deer was allured to possess it for herself. Shri Rama immediately pursued the golden animal to capture it alive. But it was too swift and agile and ran far ahead of Shri Rama in pursuit.

From a considerable distance Maricha as deer in his human voice imitating the tone of Shri Rama cried — "Save me O Lakshmana."

On hearing that Shri Sita asked Lakshmana to run to the assistance of Shri Rama, but Lakshmana laughed out saying, "It must be a ruse of the demons. My brother can never be in such dire need of succour anticipating harm." But being overanxious she called upon Lakshmana in harsh words — "Why are you delaying, have you any evil intentions?"

Then, Lakshmana put three lines of protection in front of the leaf hut and begging Shri Sita to remain inside end never to cross the lines to come out again warned her saying — "Do take care of yourself in my absence", and left for the forest following the deer and Shri Rama's trail.

Lakshmana could wait no longer after the insinuation of Shri Sita like that. He bade adieu to Shri Sita begging her again never to cross the three lines laid by him to the leaf cottage and ran forward leaving Shri Sita alone in the cottage.

At that juncture, finding the opportunity, Ravana came before the cottage door in the garb of a saint and there talking to strike terror to Shri Sita's heart, spoke deftly to her to believe him to be a saint and the harm that would come if she disregarded a saint's words.

Shri Sita retorted saying — "You are in the guise of a saint but talking in vile words" and warned him for behaving in the manner of a wicked person.

Ravana thereupon showed up in his own appearance and gave out his name as Ravana king of Lanka. Shri Sita became somewhat fear-stricken and asked him to stand and wait till Shri Rama came back.

And finding Ravana intent on taking possession of her, Shri Sita warned him again to give up his wicked intent.

Thereupon with his anger flaring up Ravana caught hold of Sita and forcibly carried her to the chariot waiting outside and himself taking a seat in it made the chariot move in the air.

As the chariot continued its aerial course Shri Sita became sorrow-stricken and stated wailing and calling upon Shri Rama to come to her rescue. She called up Lakshmana saying, "You have done nothing to be blamed. Since I misunderstood you and used hot words, I am reaping the fruits thereof."

At this juncture, the king kite of the forest hearing Shri Sita's wailings and recognising her to be none other, said in the words of the poet:

सीते पुत्रि करसि जनि त्रासा। करिहउँ जातुधान कर नासा।।
धावा क्रोधबंत खग कैसे। रुझइ परि परबत कहु जैसे।।

In other words, the king kite out of great affection for Shri Sita, addressing her as daughter, comforted her saying, "O daughter, do not get terrified, I shall fight the demon and kill him and rescue you." And swiftly flew forward like stroke of thunder on to the mountain peak.

When the king kite neared the chariot Ravana recognised the bird and said as in the poet's words:

जाना जरठ जटायू एहा। मम कर तीरथ छाड़िहिं देहा।।

In other words, "I have recognised the bird. It is old Jatayu the king kite. It will soon sacrifice its life to the sacred sabre in my hand."

The brave king kite retorted saying — "I know you too Ravana. Do as I advise or else your whole clan will burn in the fire of Shri Rama's anger like flies."

Then Ravana brought out his huge sword and dealt a hard stroke to the king kite's back. It fell down on the ground with a severe bleeding wound.

Leaving the helpless king kite like that Ravana proceeded in the chariot with Shri Sita. Shri Sita noticed a huge monkey sitting on a hillock. Uttering Shri Rama's name Shri Sita threw her scarf down to reach him. On reaching Lanka Ravana put Shri Sita in his Ashoka garden.

And Shri Sita sat there, in the words of the poet:

जेहि बिधि कपट कुरंग संग, धाइ चले श्रीराम।
सो छबि सीता राखि उर, रटत रहत हरि नाम।।

In other words, Shri Sita sat there under the Ashoka tree repeating the name of Shri Rama and holding the picture of the chase given by Shri Rama to the golden deer in her heart.

CHAPTER VIII

SEARCH FOR SHRI SITA

At that juncture, seeing younger brother Lakshmana coming from the other direction Shri Rama told him as he neared — "Both of us left Shri Sita, in the Ashram. Now let us look her up. I am afraid, she is not there."

Reaching the leaf hut on Godavari and finding that Shri Sita was not there, Shri Rama sorrow-stricken wailed for her and went out in search of her asking the trees and creepers and the beasts and birds of the forest on the way about her.

Going ahead they spied the king kite bird lying severely wounded on the ground. Shri Rama caressed it tenderly. Gathering strength the bird panted its story as in the words of the poet:

नाथ दसानन यह गति कीन्ही। तेहि खल जनक सुता हरि लीन्ही।।

In other words, the king kite with difficulty gave the news saying, "I have suffered all this at the hand of the ten-headed Ravana of Lanka. It is he who has abducted Shri Sita in his aerial chariot. The chariot with Shri Sita proceeded southwards. She was wailing bitterly for you all the while. I have with great effort remained in life to give this message to you. Now let me depart, Shri Rama."

Shri Rama said, "O kind bird, I shall cause you to live longer if you like — do not worry!"

The king kite firmly replied saying:

"I shall be lucky to breathe my last with you in view, O Rama. Do permit me to leave!" In reply Shri Rama said as in the words of the poet:

परहित बस जिन्ह के मन माही। तिन्ह कहुं दुर्लभ जग कछु नाहीं।।
तनु तजि जाहु तात मम धामा। देउं काह तुम्ह पूरन कामा।।

In other words, "Who is ever engaged in doing good to others never lacks what he desires for on earth. As you desire, on your demise do go to heaven and there all your desires will be fulfilled."

And paying great tribute to Shri Rama the king kite in its new god's image ascended to Heaven. Shri Rama himself performed all the death rites of the king kite with pleasure and attention.

After granting the king kite's last desire and sending it upto Heaven, Shri Rama and Lakshmana resumed their search for Shri Sita in the forests.

On the way, Shri Rama visited the hut of the old dame 'Sabari' by clan and popularly known as such. Seeing the brothers Shri Rama and Lakshmana, Sabari bowed before them and invited them to her hut. She had been waiting for ages on the assurance of the sages that Shri Rama would visit her one day or other. With folded hands, she prayed to Shri Rama to grant her what she never deserved being low in clan and caste.

Shri Rama in reply said as in the words of the poet:

जात पात कुल धर्म बड़ाई। धन बल परिजन गुन चतुराई।।
भगतिहीन नर सोहइ कैसा। बिनु जल बारिद पेखिअ जैसा।।

Shri Rama recounted the ninefold principles of righteousness before Sabari in simple words and on her advice proceeded to Pampaa Sarobara lake where she assured, "Sugriva will befriend you." Shri Rama gave her his love-devotion.

On the way to Pampaa Shri Rama gave a short discourse to Lakshmana on the sense enemies of man — as he observed in the words of the poet:

तात तीन अति प्रबल खल काम क्रोध अरु लोभ।
मुनि बिग्यान धाम धन करइ निमिष महुं छोभ।।

In other words — Shri Rama observed that of the sense enemies lust, ire and greed are very powerful and man should be cautious of them and try to remain far from them in life.

And Shri Rama also mentioned the merits of sages and truly righteous persons which should be held as examples for men to follow as far as practicable as in the words of the poet:

सावधान सानंद मद हीना। धीर धर्मगति परम प्रबीना।।
निजगुन सुबन सुनत सकुचाही। परगुन सुनत अधिक हरषाई।।
सम सीतल नहिं त्यागहिं नीती। सरल सुभाव सबहि सन प्रीती।।
जप तप दम संजम नेमा। गुरु गोबिंद बिप्र पद पेमा।।
श्रद्धा छमा मयत्री दाया। मुदित मम पद प्रीत अमाया।।
बिरति बिबेक बिनय बिज्ञाना। बोध जथारथ बेद पुराना।।
गावहि सुनहि सदा पेमम लीला। हेतु रहित पर हित रत सीता।।

In other words, the true righteous is never careless about any matter, is always happy and free from power, sober and righteous, wise always. And, also shy of hearing own praise, but happy to listen to praise of others, never forsakes principles of living, loves all, is plain and simple with all in dealing, reveres God and Preceptor alike, benevolent, forgiveful, compassionate, has no desire to acquire riches, is interested to read and practise advice of scriptures, never is subject to pride, not even by mistake follows unrighteous path, is always happy to meditate God and sing His praise and last, but not the least, is eager to help others without any self-interest.

Shri Rama and Lakshmana proceeded from Pampaa area ahead into the forest and neared Rushyamuka mountain area in Kiskinda. There, Sugriva (brother of Bali) concealed himself from Bali with protection of Hanuman, his minister, and others.

When Sugriva spied Shri Rama and Lakshmana walking down the foothill he was terrified anticipating them as agents of Bali and deputed Hanuman to go down in the garb of a Brahmin to ascertain who they were and what had brought them there.

Hanuman accosted Shri Rama and Lakshmana and enquired of them who they were and why they were roaming in the forest barefoot although they appeared to be of Khatriya origin.

Shri Rama in a simple and straightforward manner gave his identity as in the words of the poet:

कोसलेस दसरथ के जाये। हम पितु बचन मानि बन आये।।
नाम राम लछिमन दोउ भाई। संग नारि सुकुमारि सुहाई।।
इहां हरी निसिचर बइदेही। बिप्र फिरहि हम खोजत तेही।।
आपन चरित कहा हम गाई। बिप्र कहहु निज कथा सुनाई।।

In a simple and straightforward manner Shri Rama gave his full identity and history saying that he had come in obedience to his father Dasaratha's behest on exile accompanied by brother Lakshmana and wife Shri Sita. In the forest, consort Shri Sita had been kidnapped by the demons and so, "we are wandering in search of her", he concluded.

Recognising Shri Rama, as the Master, Hanuman bowed before him catching hold of his feet and rolled on the ground, heart full of love-devotion.

Raising his head, Hanuman begged of Shri Rama, "I asked of you as a mere animal of the forest — how is it you ask of me as if you do not know? Being all knowing Master of all beings you know everything about all around."

Thereafter disclosing his own form as Hanuman he again bowed before Shri Rama acknowledging him as his own Lord and Master. Shri Rama picked him up and embraced him as his seeker. And said as in the words of the poet:

समदरसी मोहि कह सब कोऊ। सेवक प्रिय अनन्य गति सोऊ।।

In other words, Shri Rama said, "The people say that all are equal in my view, but truly, I am fond of my devotees and so bound by my word to them."

Then Hanuman made bold to mention that "on yonder Rushyamuka hill, Sugriva head of the monkey tribe whose wife has been abducted is in fright of his oppressive brother Bali. He will befriend you and serve in all possible ways and help you to find Shri Sita out."

Hanuman then took both Shri Rama and Lakshmana on his shoulders up the hill where Sugriva was. There, Sugriva bowed before both of them. In the meantime, Hanuman lit a fire of faggots and formalised the friendship of Shri Rama and Sugriva.

Sugriva recounted there how he had got hold of the scarf of Shri Sita which she dropped while being forcibly taken away in the aerial chariot of Ravana repeating Rama, Shri Rama, all the while.

On Shri Rama asking for the scarf Sugriva promptly produced it and Shri Rama recognising the same put it on himself. Then, he asked of Sugriva as to why he was living in concealment in the hill cave.

Sugriva recounted how the enmity between him and brother Bali grew to serious proportions. “Since then I am living here as Bali due to the curse of a sage cannot come here. He, though my elder brother, has kidnapped my wife and property and all and I am living here with the help of my friends Hanuman and others.”

Shri Rama got enraged and said in the words of the poet:

सुनु सुग्रीव मारि हउं, बालिहि एकहि बान।

In other words, on hearing Sugriva, Shri Rama was moved by pity and anger and promised to assist him by putting an end to Bali's misdemeanour by a single shaft.

And Shri Rama in a short discourse mentioned the qualities of the good friend which is worth emulation by all.

Said Shri Rama, “If one does not become sorry on hearing of the sorrows of his friend the wise say it is sinful to look at such a person. A true friend takes his own sorrow small as a mere til seed, while treats the friend's meagre sorrow as major one. He guides friend to live a righteous life forsaking the unrighteous one. He is never unwilling to help the friend, always ready to help as best as he can. In times of distress takes care of friend to the best of his ability. These are recognised in the Vedas as the good qualities of a true friend”, he concluded.

And also as in the poet's words:

आगे कह मुदु बचन बनाई। पाछे अनहित मन कुटिलाई।।
जाकर चित अहि गति सम भाई। अस कुमित्र परिहरिहि भलाई।।

In other words, said Shri Rama, “If the friend talks in presence in a friendly manner but behind the back of the friend talks ill of him, such a friend has to be forsaken without delay.”

Then Shri Rama asked Sugriva to go and ask Bali to a combat. Sugriva did accordingly and Bali who treated Sugriva of scant prowess was ready to respond to the call at once. His wife who knew better tried to prevent hasty action mentioning that Sugriva had enlisted support of Shri Rama whose prowess is immeasurable. But Bali brushed her aside and ran out to fight Sugriva.

Shri Rama was confused as both Bali and Sugriva, the two brothers, resembled each other closely. Sugriva ran away from the fight being unable to withstand Bali's assault and wailed before Shri Rama his discomfiture. Shri Rama put a flower garland on Sugriva's neck to identify him and sent Sugriva again for combat.

This time from behind a tree, Shri Rama shot a shaft which felled Bali to the ground with mortal wounds. Then Shri Rama disclosed himself and came where Bali was lying on the ground. Thereupon, Bali addressing Shri Rama said, in the words of the poet:

धरम हेतु अवतरेउ गुसाईं। मारेहु मोहि ब्याध की नाईं।।
मैं बैरी सुगरीव पिआरा। अवगुन कवन नाथ मोहि मारा।।

In other words, when Bali lying with mortal wounds spied Shri Rama he questioned Shri Rama asking, "I am told you have incarnated for re-establishing righteousness on earth, how is it you shot at me like a hunter from behind a tree without any regard for righteous behaviour?"

Shri Rama promptly replied as in the words of the poet:

अनुजबधू भगिनी सुत नारी। सुन सठ कन्या सम ए चारी।।
इन्हहिं कुदृष्टि बिलोकइ जोई। ताहि बधे कुछ पाप न होई।।

In other words, explained Shri Rama to Bali saying "Wife of younger brother, daughter-in-law, sister and daughter are on the sacred relationship of the daughter. Whosoever even casts a vile glance at any of them, he is no doubt fit to be slain as a brute without any constraint.

"But, if you want I can so dispose that you may remain in life in your present condition."

Bali pleaded with Shri Rama saying, in the words of the poet:

जनम जनम मुनि जतन कराही। अंत राम कहि आवत नाहीं।।
मम लोचन गोचर सोइ आवा। बहुरि कि प्रभु अस बनहि बनावा।।

In other words, replied Bali saying "Sages who incessantly meditate and sing the Lord's name in successive births are not able to remember and take the name of the Lord Almighty at the last hour of life. In my case, while I am in the grip of death, the Lord Himself is in my full view. Can there be any such opportunity again for me? No Lord, do please so ordain that I proceed to the Lord's place (Heaven) as soon as possible."

Seeing Tara, wife of Bali in great distress and sorrow-stricken at the death of Bali, Shri Rama explained to her so that she would treat the soul of Bali as the real essence of the departing man. The body made of the five elements of earth, water, air, light and sky (क्षिति, अप, मरुत, तेज, व्योम) is subject to decay and death. The death of his body is not his real death. For, his soul is immortal and eternal. And Shri Rama made his soul to ascend to heaven.

Then with Shri Rama's consent Sugriva performed the death rites according to scriptures and after all that ended Shri Rama directed Shri Lakshmana to arrange for "Abhiseka" of Sugriva in place of Bali as king of Kiskinda. And Angada, son of Bali, to be anointed as 'Yubaraja' or next successor to the throne.

In the meantime, the rainy season having set in Shri Rama continued to stay in Kiskinda till winter came round.

No news regarding Shri Sita's whereabouts was available till then although a period of over three months had elapsed in the meantime. Even Sugriva had become quiet after getting kingship of Kiskinda.

Then with Sugriva's initiative and leadership of Hanuman the residents of Kiskinda were assigned the job of searching out Shri Sita in a period of a couple of months at the most. Shri Rama handed over the gold ring from his finger to Hanuman to show to Shri Sita to establish genuineness of the mission.

After some more discussion, Jambabana the elderly counsellor to Bali advised Hanuman to cross the ocean by jumping it over and in Lanka to locate Shri Sita and return as early as possible. "After that, Shri Rama himself would lead the expedition to Lanka to fight the demon king Ravana and rescue Shri Sita from captivity", he added.

Hanuman then took leave of all the friends and companions on the sea-shore and going atop a hill there and taking the name of Shri Rama leaped forward to cross the hundred "Yojana" sea separating Lanka.

Crossing over the sea, Hanuman alighted on the other shore and went atop a rocky hill to take a look around and notice the beauteous spots in which Lanka abounded.

Hanuman also noticed the large number of guards to the city of Lanka and not to attract their attention transformed himself into a tiny creature and proceeded inside.

The demoness Lankini by name, known as guardian to Lanka, accosted Hanuman and wanted to devour him. Hanuman doubled his size in excess of her mouth size till when she made it one hundred Yojanas wide, Shri Hanuman became two hundred in size and again reduced his body to that of a tiny mosquito's size and entered the mouth cavity of the demoness and came out as if at play. Lankini was glad to find Hanuman as clever as that, and blessed him and let him proceed.

Hanuman went on checking up possible places where Shri Sita might have been lodged, even including the palace of Ravana, but could not find her anywhere. At that juncture, Hanuman noticed a house where "tulu" plants (tulasi) were grown in abundance and the house had Shri Rama's "tilak" mark on the walls.

In the garb of a Brahmin Hanuman approached the house. Bibhisana, Ravana's brother, whose residence it was, came out and met Hanuman who gave him his identity. Bishisana was glad to meet Hanuman who was Shri Rama's messenger, and Bibhisana a devotee of Shri Rama.

Then, Hanuman informed Bibhisana of the purpose of his visit and begged of him to help him to locate Shri Sita. On advice of Bibhisana Hanuman went to the Ashoka garden of Ravana as instructed by Bibhisana and remained concealed in the leaves and branches of the trees for some time when Ranava accompanied by Mandodari, his wife, came and accosting Shri Sita he begged of her to look up at him. The allurement held out by Ravana to Shri Sita was the position of the head queen of his harem. That made her further unhappy and infuriated. She rebuked Ravana as a cheat and licentious man whereupon Ravana lost his temper and ran to assault Shri Sita with a sword.

Mandodari, Ravana's wife, intervened and saved the situation. Ravana warned Shri Sita to make up her mind soon failing which she would be slain. And so saying left Shri Sita alone.

At this juncture, Hanuman put down from the Ashoka tree branch Shri Rama's gold ring which he was given when he started on his mission to locate Shri Sita. Shri Sita picked it up and immediately recognised it to be genuine, and belonging to Shri Rama. Hanuman came near Shri Sita and bowed before her. From his words, she recognised Hanuman as true devotee of Shri Rama and gave him a piece of her gold head-ornament.

Hanuman disclosed his prowess as a devotee of Shri Rama by assuming a tremendously powerful body, tall and stout. He told Shri Sita that because Shri Rama did not know about her whereabouts there was delay in rescuing her from the demons. Now that Shri Rama will know that it will not take him long at all to exterminate the demons.

Then with Shri Sita's permission Hanuman entered the fruit trees section to take some fruits to appease his hunger. In course of plucking fruits, Hanuman broke down and damaged many trees whereupon Ravana sent his guards and soldiers and later his son Indrajit to slay the monkey, Hanuman.

By use of divine Brahmastra, Indrajit was able to capture Hanuman. And as punishment ordained by Ravana, the tail of Hanuman was to be set ablaze being the most favourite part of a monkey's body.

But it came as a boon for Hanuman who with the help of the burning tail set fire to the houses in Lanka except the house of Bibhisana where Hanuman was received by him.

Thereupon after extinguishing the burning tail by dipping it in the sea water, Hanuman set out on the return journey.

On reaching the opposite sea beach where Jambabana and other friends were waiting for the return of Hanuman they all went together and bowed before Shri Rama and Lakshmana sitting together and gave the news about locating Shri Sita in the Ashoka Garden of Ravana. Hanuman made over to Shri Rama the ornament Shri Sita had given on his asking. Shri Rama took that gracefully and made it over to brother Lakshmana for safe keeping.

Shri Rama expressed his gratitude to Hanuman in the following words of the poet:

सुन कपि तोहि समान उपकारी। नहिं कोउ सुर नर मुनि तनुधारी।।
प्रति उपकार करौं का तोरा। सनमुख होइ न सकइ मन मोरा।।

In other words, "There is none as helpful as you are", said Shri Rama to Hanuman. "I am indebted to you and I cannot see how I can repay your debt."

In reply, Hanuman begged of Shri Rama for his grace and kindness and firm devotion to Shri Rama in his heart as in the following words of the poet:

नाथ भगति अति सुख दायिनी। देहु कृपा करि अनपायनी।।
सुनि प्रभु परम सरल कपि बानी। एवमस्तु कहेउ भवानी।।

In other words, Hanuman expressed his gratitude to Shri Rama and begged as follows:

"O Lord, your love-devotion is so blissful. Do grant me to store that in my heart of hearts."

Hearing the simple words of Hanuman Shri Rama readily replied saying — "So be it as you desire."

CHAPTER IX

MARCH TO LANKA

Thereupon, Shri Rama called upon Sugriva to make ready the march to Lanka. Sugriva in reply begged of Shri Rama, "Do give orders and also your grace for our victory march."

Without delay the whole army of monkeys and bears and heroes all got ready to proceed to Lanka and within reasonable time reached the sea-shore to cross over to Lanka.

The news regarding the advance of the army of Shri Rama to the sea-shore reached Ranava in his royal assembly.

Ravana asked his ministers and senior members of the assembly on their reaction to the news. They smiled and said, "Sit quietly", meaning thereby, of what great significance is the news that it needed consideration and deliberation in the assembly? Here is a gang of men and monkeys to face. What is there to worry in such a case? Says the poet:

सचिव बैद गुरु तीनि जौ, प्रिय बोलहि भय आस।
राजधर्म तन तीन करि, होइ बेगइ नास।।

In other words: When ministers (advisers), doctors and preceptors without being frank and free in their opinion on serious affairs, express what will please the master or ruler they do so at the cost of their true duty and thereby transgress righteousness. That would not help, but harm the cause of the master or ruler. It is highly irregular and unfair to act in such a manner. The advisers of Ranava ought to have come out with their true opinion frankly.

At this juncture, brother Bibhisana came into the royal assembly and bowed to brother Ravana, and before taking seat bowed again. On being asked for opinion on the point of consideration Bibhisana said, "Brother, if you are desirous of your own well-being and fame to earn, do please return another's consort whom you have captured and kept unfairly with you, and avoid looking at her as people turn their eyes away from the "4th day moon" considering that as a perfidious sin." He added, "In the case of person of great might or position, the slightest defect spoils his reputation and he loses his name and fame thereby."

Bibhisana further added — as in the words of the poet:

काम क्रोध मद लोभ सब नाथ नरक के पंथ।
सब परिहरि रघुबीरहि भजहु भजेहि जेहि संत।।

In other words: "Lust, ire, love of power and greed are all base and vile. They lead man to hell only. O brother discard these enemies and engage in meditating Shri Rama who is sought after and meditated by sages and saints."

Bibhisana went on saying:

"Shri Rama is not mere human. He is God incarnate of the Almighty. He is compassion personified who has incarnated for protection of the righteous and all beings of the Universe created by Him. Forsake enmity to Him dear brother, bow to Him, restore Shri Sita to Him at once and start praying to Him."

Bibhisana went on further — "Shri Rama does not forsake anyone who seeks and comes under his shelter. Such is the Almighty. I bow to you again and again and beseech of you to come under His shelter."

"All this is what the great sage Pulasti whom you know, has asked me to bring to your notice and I do so now getting an opportunity for that."

Ravana shouted at Bibhisana saying — "Two of you, Malyabanta and you, are always talking in this vein praising the enemy. Malyabanta has already deserted here. What about you?" asked Ravana.

Bibhisana again pleaded with folded hands — "O brother do listen! Everyone has both good and bad qualities in him. He who lives in righteousness enjoys all bliss and comfort and the unrighteous has in life suffering and disgrace. In your case, it is unrighteousness that reigns your mind and heart and for the wholesale extermination of the demon clan you have captured Shri Sita." He concluded: "O brother I beseech you do please restore Shri Sita to Shri Rama and adore Him as the Universe's master and saviour."

So much of Bibhisana's adoration of Shri Rama upset and enraged Ravana. He rebuked brother Bibhisana in harsh words and asked him to go to the "Tapas" leaving Lanka and his protection as in the words of the poet:

जिअसि सदा सठ मोर जिआवा। रिपुकर पछ मूढ़ तोहि भावा।।
मम पुर बसि तपसिन्ह पर प्रीति। सठ मिलु जाइ तिन्हहि कछु नीति।।
अस कहि कीन्हेसि चरन प्रहारा। अनुज गहे पद बारहि बारा।।

In other words — said Ravana:

"You are being maintained by my munificence but singing the praise of my enemy. Living you are in my establishment, but dear to you are my enemies. Go to him whose praise you sing, leave me alone."

So, upbraiding Bibhisana, Ravana dealt him hard kicks with his foot while Bibhisana tried to catch his foot again and again to calm him down.

The noble Bibhisana acted as in the words of the poet:

उमा संत कर इहइ बड़ाई। मंद करत जो करत भलाई।।
तुम्ह पितु सरिस भलेइ मोहि मारा। राम भजे हित नाथ तुम्हारा।।

In other words, in spite of kicks given by Ravana brother Bibhisana tried to catch his foot to assuage his anger and said: "You are like my father and you have done well by giving me kicks but if you meditate Shri Rama you will gain His blessings." In spite of kicks dealt to Bibhisana by Ravana, Bibhisana went on giving him good advice:

"O, my brother, I beseech you, do keep my words of love.

"Do restore Shri Sita and meditate Shri Rama, you will get all that you lost."

Then, Bibhisana left with his own ministers by his aerial chariot declaring for all to hear as in the words of the poet:

मैं रघुबीर सरन अब जाहुं देहु जनि खोरि।।

In other words: "Listen all, Shri Rama the Lord Almighty is steadfast on truth, whereas the assembly of Ravana is in the grip of unrighteousness. Hence I am going to take shelter of Shri Rama. Let none blame me for this."

And as Bibhisana proceeded in the chariot to meet Shri Rama, he was delighted to cogitate that he would see with his own eyes the feet which made Dandak forest a sacred tract; of which Shri Bharata carried on his head the wooden "Kathau" and which ran after the golden deer as desired by Shri Sita, touching which Ahalya, consort of sage Goutama, attained salvation.

Cogitating like that Bibhisana reached in his aerial chariot the other shore after crossing the sea. When the followers of Sugriva saw Bibhisana coming that way alighting from his chariot, they ascertained his identity from his chariot, and came and reported to Sugriva that Bibhisana, brother of Ravana, had come to meet Shri Rama.

Along with Sugriva and Hanuman, they all went to Shri Rama and reported about Bibhisana to him. Shri Rama, on the other hand, asked Sugriva what action he thought would be proper to take. And Sugriva advised that Bibhisana being a demon he might have come with some evil motive. So, it would be wise to keep him at bay as he might have come to collect some secret information which may be disadvantageous to us if known to the enemy.

Shri Rama smiled and replied, "Yes friend, Sugriva, what you say is justified, on principle no doubt, but I have taken the vow that whoever approaches to take my shelter, will not be spurned by me."

And as the poet says:

सरनागत कहुं जे तजहिं निज अनहित अनुमानि।
ते नर पांवर पापमय, तिन्हहि बिलोकति हानि।।

In other words — "Whoever spurns the man seeking help and shelter in his distress presuming that it would be harmful for him to entertain such a person and help, is a thoroughly unrighteous man and whoever looks upon him incurs great sin and loss.

"And further friends, if Bibhisana were vile and unrighteous could he have been able to come to my presence?"

Then Shri Rama assured Sugriva that even if Bibhisana had been deputed by Ravana to collect some vital information, no fear, for Shri Lakshmana can slay all the demons that may try to harm us.

"So, Bibhisana may be brought before me without hesitation", directed Shri Rama.

Shri Rama further said as in the words of the poet:

निर्मल मन जन सो मोहि पावा। मोहि कपट छल छिद्र न भावा।।
भेद लेन पठवा दससीसा। तबहुं न कछु भय हानि कपीसा।।

In other words, said Shri Rama, "Only men with clean mind and heart can realise me and only such men will have the desire to come before me. If Bibhisana has the urge to come to me he cannot but be such a person. So, he should be welcomed and allowed to meet me."

"On the other hand", continued Shri Rama, "if Bibhisana has got any evil motive know it that Lakshmana alone can deal with and slay all the demons however large their number may be. So do not hesitate to bring him up to me."

Both Hanuman and Sugriva went and escorted Bibhisana to Shri Rama. Bibhisana bowed to Shri Rama with love-devotion welling up in him and in simple words gave his identity as brother of demon Ravana of Lanka and that he had come to surrender to him to gain his shelter.

Shri Rama picked Bibhisana up and clasped him to his heart and addressing him as "लंकेस" or King of Lanka, enquired of his well-being. Bibhisana humbly mentioned how he was being harassed in Lanka by Ravana and added, "Now that I have looked upon your lotus feet all that is a past matter and I am safe and sound under your protection."

Shri Rama then mentioned to him how to obtain God's shelter on earth. He said, "Whoever discarding his desires and attachment to worldly objects and relations wholeheartedly surrenders to me and engages in helping others in their need and distress, I accept him with affection and build him up as good as a true sage."

Bibhisana with love-devotion for Shri Rama welling up in him bowed again and again at his feet and said, "O Kind Lord, I had some desire before seeing you, but when I had the good fortune of meeting you all that vanished from me. My only desire now is to possess love-devotion for you in ample measure."

And then Shri Rama asked for some sea water and said, "Although you have now shed your desires, I have to give my blessings to you" — so saying Shri Rama with the sea water himself anointed Bibhisana as King of Lanka (लंकेस). There was profuse dropping of flowers by Gods from Heaven to mark the occasion and to demonstrate their approval of Shri Rama's action.

Then Shri Rama called upon Bibhisana saying, "O King of Lanka now do advise how the army of monkeys will cross the deep sea full of predatory animals like alligators to reach Lanka to deal with Ravana!"

Bibhisana in his simple and humble way suggested saying, "O Lord, the ocean is your clan preceptor. If you consult him he will advise you on that."

This suggestion of Bibhisana did not appeal to Lakshmana who remarked saying — "It is the idle only who call upon gods for assistance. Do tell us how by our own efforts we shall be able to cross the sea."

Shri Rama told brother Lakshmana, "I shall do that, but let me try what Bibhisana has suggested." So saying, he proceeded to the sea-shore and kneeling down prayed to the Sea God, Varuna, to help him.

Although three days passed the Sea God did not make any move to offer help or suggestion. Shri Rama was annoyed and in great anger asked brother Lakshmana:

"Bring out my bow and arrows. I shall have the sea dried by my shafts." Then, he observed as in the words of the poet:

सठ सन विनय कुटिल सन प्रीती। सहज कृपन सन सुंदर नीती।।
ममता रत सन ज्ञान कहानी। अति लोभी सन बिरति बखानी।।
क्रोधिहि सन कामिहि हरि कथा। ऊसर बीज बए फल जथा।।

In other words: "The cheat cannot be moved by humility, the vile by affection, the miser cannot yield to help on hearing principles of charity, the man subject to attachment gained over by strength of knowledge, the greedy by advice to drop desires, the lustful by praise of Almighty Father, and on fallow and rocky lands to raise a bumper crop."

Shri Rama then got ready to shoot a shaft at the sea and thereupon, the Sea God (Varuna) rose up from the sea with a plate full of gold and jewels in the garb of a Brahmana. Seeing that, Shri Rama observed as in the words of the poet:

काटेहु पइ कदरी फरइ, कोटि जतन कर सींच।
बिनय न मान खगेस सुनु, डांटेहि पइ नव नीच।।

In other words — Shri Rama observed aside, "The banana tree fruits by cutting the trunk, the vile listens to harsh words and not humble ones."

The Sea God then begged Shri Rama to excuse him for the delay in response adding that the vile responds to harsh words of rebuke and not to humble request, the lowly man (Sudra) the drum, the beast and the woman to harsh treatment and beating and not caressing.

Shri Rama smiled and queried, "Do tell us how the army of monkey, bear and other warriors will cross the sea."

Then the Sea God said in plain words of advice, as in the words of the poet:

नाथ नील नल कपि दौ भाई। लरिकाई रिषि आसिस पाई।।
तिन्ह के परस किये गिरि भारे। तरिहहिं जलधि प्रताप तुम्हारे।।
मैं पुनि उर धरि प्रभु प्रभुताई। करिहउं बल अनुमान सहाई।।

In other words — "Among the monkeys are craftsmen like Nala and Nila. With their special gift of touch, the stones and trees will lose their weight and float in water. They will be able with monkey workers to set the floating stones and trees in position and build the bridge for the army and warriors and animals to cross over to Lanka."

So saying the Sea God (Varuna) bowed and took leave of Shri Rama and returned to his residence under the sea.

According to the advice given by the Sea God, Varuna, to Shri Rama, there were two outstanding craftsmen among the monkeys, Nala and Nila. They had the special gift of touch by which things like stones and trees lost their weight and became weightless. They would be useful in bringing weightlessness to the stones and tree trunks to be used in the construction of the bridge to Lanka.

And accordingly the stones and tree trunks were touched by Nala and Nila and collected and carried easily to the bridge site by hordes of monkey workers for the construction of the bridge.

In the words of the poet, Shri Rama is said to have declared in this connection on the spot:

करिहिहुं इहां संभु थापना। मोरे ह्रदयं परम कलपना।।

Shri Rama at this juncture resolved to worship Shiva and there was need for a Brahmana qualified to establish Shri Shiva at the bridgehead. The local monkeys called such Brahmanas at hand. And Shri Rama with their assistance established God Shiva who was named "Rameswaram". The Shiva Lingam established there is still known widely and worshipped by people as Lord Shiva "Rameswaram".

Shri Rama also declared as in the words of the poet:

सिवद्रोही मम भगत कहावा। सो नर सपनेहु मोहि न पावा।।
संकर बिमुख भगत कह मोरी। सो नारकी मूढ़ मति खोरी।।

In other words — Shri Rama declared clearly. "A person opposed to Shiva cannot be my devotee; such a person can only be a fool of the first water."

CHAPTER X

THE GREAT BATTLE (FALL OF RAVANA)

At Lanka when Mandodari, wife of Ravana, came to know that her husband was going to fight Shri Rama, she approached him and begged to abandon such a foolish enterprise. In the words of the poet, she said:

नाथ बयरु कीजै ताही सौं। बुधि बल सकै जीति जाही सौं।।
तुम्ह रघुपतिहि अंतर कैसा। खलु खद्योत दिनकरहि जैसा।।

In other words — Mandodari pointed out that the difference between Shri Rama and Ravana was as between the Sun and the glow-worm. Enmity between equals may be fruitful but never in cases of great disparity.

Mandodari further pleaded with Ravana to restore Shri Sita to Shri Rama, and repair to the forest to meditate on the Almighty, Shri Rama, after putting our son on the throne of Lanka — as in the words of the poet:

रामहिं सौंपि जानकी, नाइ कमल पद माथ।
सुत कहुं राज समर्पि बन, जाइ भजिअ रघुनाथ।।

But Ravana was adamant. He comforted wife Mandodari saying — "Who in war I have not vanquished of Gods, men or demons? These are mere "Tapas boys" far below my standard in prowess. On the other hand, women are timid, unsympathetic, unkind, unsteady and unconscientious." The words of advice of wife Mandodari and son Prahasta did not register any effect on Ravana.

The next morning Jambabana suggested to Shri Rama to depute Angada, son of Bali, to Ravana as messenger which received Shri Rama's approval. He sent for Angada and said to him in the words of the poet:

बहुत बुझाई तुम्हइ का कहहुं। परम चतुर जो जानत अहहुं।।
काजु हमार जासु हित होई। रिपु सन करहु बबकरी सोई।।

In other words, Shri Rama said — “Dear Angada, you are intelligent, do go as our messenger and try to be helpful to Ravana too as to us.”

Angada bowed before Shri Rama and proceeded on his errand forthwith. Meeting Ravana later Angada said to him — as in the words of the poet:

नृप अभिमान मोह बस किंबा। हरि आनिहु सीता जगदंबा।।
अब सुन कहा सुनहु तुम्ह मोरा। सब अपराध छमहिं प्रभु तोरा।।
सादर जनक सुतहि करि आगे। एहि बिधि चलउ सकल भय त्यागे।।

In other words: Angada as messenger said to Ravana on meeting, “O King of Lanka, either out of pride or lust you have kidnapped Shri Sita wife of Shri Rama. The best course now would be to proceed with Shri Sita to restore her to Shri Rama without any apprehension.”

Ravana retorted saying — “It is a pity that though born of Bali as Monkey king’s son, you have no shame to declare that you are messenger of Tapas lads.”

Angada put in — “Listen Ravana, not only Shiva but Brahma also is solicitous of serving Shri Rama’s feet but you are not able to see that although you have as many as twenty eyes and ears.”

Ravana promptly pointed out ,“I am tolerating your harsh words as you are a messenger for I know canons of proper conduct in such a case.”

Angada at once retorted saying — “Is that why you have no compunction to kidnap another’s wife?”

According to Ravana as he expressed before Angada Shri Rama was exiled — in the words of the poet:

अगुन अमान जानि पिता, तेहि दीन्ह बनवास।
सो दुख अरु जुबती बिरह, पुनि निसि दिन मम त्रास।।

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Rama is suffering the exile, on top of which he is sorrow-stricken due to abduction of his wife, Shri Sita, and in constant fear of me, his prowess has waned down. In his deplorable condition, he will never be able to withstand my onslaught."

"On the other hand", countered Angada, "O Ravana leave Shri Rama alone, I challenge you to move my foot which I have planted here on the ground. I am a mere messenger of Shri Rama. You can then guess Shri Rama's prowess, what that would be."

Ravana sat with bowed head on his Royal Throne, but looked as if devoid of all his fame and prowess.

Mandodari, Ravana's wife, noticing the trend in Ravana's attitude again pleaded with him to give up enmity with Shri Rama recalling the discomfiture suffered by Maricha, Khara and Dushana, disposal of the great hero Bali with one single shaft, laying a floating bridge over the sea in such a short time. "He has sent a messenger in Angada which is for your good", said she.

Ravana paid scant attention to his wife's advice and left for the Royal Assembly for consultation with his ministers.

On the other hand, in Shri Rama's camp, Angada and others were sent for by Shri Rama for consultation as to the action to be taken against Ravana and on their arrival Shri Rama asked Angada saying — "tell me my friend, how did you get hold of four crowns of king Ravana, and wherefrom did you bring them."

Angada bowed before Shri Rama again and humbly submitted, "O Lord, the king in order to maintain his rule has to possess the four essential qualities of affection, gifts, punishment and division.

"In Ravana, we do not find all these qualities of the ruler. Hence we deserted him and sought your shelter as you are the fountain-head of all these kingly qualities."

And Angada then brought to Shri Rama's notice all the up-to-date vital information. "The fort of Lanka", said he, "has four entrance gates." Bibhisana then opened his lips and said, "Let us divide our army into four main divisions and each division take up one of the four entrances and gaining access attack the inmates of Lanka city."

Hanuman was accordingly leading one division which faced opposition from Meghanada, Ravana's son's unit. Finding that Ravana's soldiers were facing reverses in various fronts from the monkey soldiers of Shri Rama, Malyabanta, the demon grandfather of Ravana, being father to Ravana's mother, advised Ravana saying, "from the time you kidnapped Shri Sita, bad luck was goading you in all fields. You had better restore Shri Sita to Rama and stop opposing him."

Hearing his words, Meghanada could not tolerate the decrying words and shouted, "where are the "Tapas" lads Rama and Lakshmana, where are Nala and Nila and other craftsmen monkeys, and Hanuman and other monkey heroes, and where is Bibhisana who opposes his elder brother?"

And Meghanada's arrows caused havoc in the monkey ranks who ran hither and thither in fright to save themselves.

Hanuman on seeing the reverses came forward with a big stone that he threw at demon Meghanada. Though it did not hit him, Meghanada knew his prowess and avoided to come near him.

Then, Meghanada reached where Shri Rama and Lakshmana were on the hill top and started showering shafts at them which Shri Rama warded off from a distance with ease by counter shafts. Lakshmana then advanced on Meghanada and there was heavy fighting between them. In it Lakshmana had some reverses and a serious injury which felled him to the ground. He was promptly rescued by Hanuman and brought to where Shri Rama was.

Shri Rama was upset to see brother Lakshmana's condition and looked at Hanuman as to ask what was to be done. At that juncture, Jambabanta informed that vaida (doctor) Susena lived in Lanka. He is the best to tackle such cases. Hanuman sought out Susena and brought from his house soon and he examined Shri Lakshmana and said that the required medicine was available on a particular hill "Gandhamadan" of which he gave the location.

Hanuman proceeded fast by leaping into air and reached the hill but could not identify the medicinal herb. In order to avoid delay Hanuman uprooted the hill and turned back carrying it on his shoulder.

On the way over Ayodhya, Shri Bharata saw and imagined that it must be a demon going to do some harm to Rama. He used his special shaft at the flying hillock which caused Hanuman to fall down on ground and regaining breath called upon Shri Rama, as by habit, to help him in his crisis.

Bharata was upset on hearing from Hanuman about Lakshmana's condition and wailed aloud and prayed to Shri Rama for succour. He helped Hanuman to resume his journey.

On the other hand, due to delay in the return of Hanuman, Shri Rama wailed as Lakshmana was still not well and awake.

Just at that juncture, Hanuman returned with the medicine after journey from Ayodhya where he met Shri Bharata. Shri Rama was very happy and clasped Hanuman to his heart.

In view of the reverses of the demon soldiers of Ravana, at the instance of Ravana, they woke up Kumbhakarna, brother of Ravana, from his long sleep. On waking up and learning the details of the dispute with Shri Rama, Kumbhakarna was highly annoyed and rebuked brother Ravana saying, "why have you abducted Shri Sita? It is wrong on your part to incur enmity and wrath of Shri Rama", he observed.

On the way, Kumbhakarna met Bibhisana, bowed before him being his younger brother, who informed him how he was ill-treated by Ravana with kicks from his foot because he revered Shri Rama. "This was not correct on his part", said Kumbhakarna and promised never to support him.

Then, Shri Rama took a hard turn and himself dealt with Kumbhakarna who was creating havoc in the ranks of monkey armies and shot at him a hard shaft which removed his head and carried it to where Ravana was. The head dropped in front of Ravana.

After Kumbhakarna, Meghanada put up a stiff fight from the side of the demons but in the prolonged fight between him and Shri Lakshmana as he was illusive it took quite some time to bring him his end.

He was engaged in a sacrifice which on the behest of Shri Lakshmana the monkey soldiers defiled and damaged preventing him to complete it. In the meantime, Shri Rama also turned his attention on him and Meghanada too fell to his shaft and breathed his last. He called out, "O Lakshmana, and O Shri Rama" and that pleased Angada and Hanuman who praised his mother heartily for that.

Finding Ravana shooting down monkeys and bears of their army Shri Lakshmana bowing to Shri Rama called out to Ravana to try his shafts on him rather than monkeys and bears. There ensued a hard fight between the two.

In no time, the shafts of Lakshmana disposed of many of Ravana's chariots and charioteers and after a while made Ravana fall down from his chariot with severe injury. Getting up Ravana shot the special shaft "Brahmastra" at Lakshmana to which Lakshmana sustained a severe injury and fell down on the ground.

When Hanuman ran to help Lakshmana to get up on his feet Ravana ran at Hanuman and dealt heavy blows with his fist.

At that juncture, Shri Rama hastened there and asking Hanuman to take another sector, himself engaged in fight with Ravana. Ravana lost his consciousness to the hard shafts of Shri Rama. Finding him helpless the charioteer drove him away to Lankapuri in another chariot.

Regaining his senses at Lankapuri, Ravana soon engaged in a special sacrifice to be able to deal with Shri Rama. Bibhisana ran up to Shri Rama and informed that if Ravana completed the sacrifice it would be hard to slay him thereafter. Shri Rama deputed Sugriva and Angada to deal with Ravana. Angada gave Ravana a heavy kick. While Angada engaged with Ravana, Sugriva defiled the sacrifice arrangements fully.

Finding Shri Rama on foot fighting Ravana from chariot, the gods of heaven prevailed upon Indra to send a suitable chariot for use of Shri Rama. Indra complied promptly and a resplendent chariot was readily made available to Shri Rama for his use with Matali as charioteer.

Shri Rama called out to Ravana saying — "There are three types of men on earth, one shouts but does nothing, the second shouts and does, and the third does but does not shout. Yours is of the first priority."

At one point, Ravana aimed a very powerful shaft at Bibhisana. Shri Rama covered Bibhisana up by his own presence and took the shaft on himself and the shaft proved futile.

Then quickly aiming at Hanuman and other monkey heroes Ravana succeeded in inflicting severe injuries.

Hearing from Trijata demoness about regeneration of Ravana's heads and hands as soon as severed by Shri Rama and Lakshmana, Shri Sita became apprehensive and worried.

Trijata then said, "at the very moment Ravana's head and hands are cut and he becomes senseless, Ravana cannot hold anyone far less you in his heart. At that juncture, Shri Rama should put his shaft in the heart of Ravana which will kill him without fail. At the same moment, another shaft should pierce Ravana's navel region where there is nectar that gave him regeneration of heads. That region should also be destroyed. Then Ravana would surely meet his end."

Shri Rama became aware and in the very next shot sent simultaneously two shafts one to Ravana's heart and the other to his navel. The next shot cut Ravana's heads and hands. Ravana fell down dead on the ground.

Then as directed by Shri Rama, Bibhisana performed the death rites of Ravana. That was how the great demon king breathed his last.

And Shri Rama directed Hanuman saying, "Proceed to Lanka city and give the news to Shri Sita and escort her along with you to our camp here."

On reaching Shri Sita, Hanuman bowed before her from a distance. Shri Sita recognised him. Hanuman gave the news regarding fall of Ravana and anointing of Bibhisana as King of Lanka. And as desired by Shri Rama, Shri Sita was to proceed in the palanquin made ready after donning the ornaments and silks brought by King Bibhisana for her.

CHAPTER XI

RETURN TO AYODHYA

Then with adequate guards, Shri Sita was to proceed in the palanquin. At the outskirts of Shri Rama's camp, the palanquin bearers halted and as desired by Shri Rama, Shri Sita alighted there and walked the short distance for the monkey and bear army men to see their mother.

Shri Rama indicated that Shri Sita should prove her chastity before all. Shri Sita asked Shri Lakshmana to light a pyre with faggots for her to pass through the fire to satisfy Shri Rama. She prayed to Fire God to help her to pass through the flame as through a bank of sandal paste.

Gods of heaven assembled around the fire flame and all prayed to Shri Rama. Shri Dasaratha also alighted from heaven and clasped Shri Rama and Lakshmana who bowed to their departed father. Others present also bowed to him out of deep regard.

Shri Rama took leave of all, blessed Bibhisana and all other demon leaders.

Then in the aerial chariot of King Bibhisana, Shri Rama, Lakshmana and Shri Sita started their journey back to Ayodhya. On the way, Bibhisana and some other monkey friends of Shri Rama pointed out spots where Lakshmana slayed Indrajit son of Ravana in war; Hanuman and Angada slayed countless demon fighters; where in the forest, he and Lakshmana searched for Shri Sita and also where at Chitrakuta they all stayed for some days before proceeding to south for Lanka.

At Prayag, they worshipped Ganges and the sacred "Prayagdham". Proceeding ahead and nearing Ayodhya they all bowed from the plane to their native land. Here, the Nishada Raj Guha met them and accompanied them in the aerial chariot onwards to Ayodhya.

For the fourteen years of Shri Rama's exile to end only one day more remained. Yet, there was no news of his return till then and so the people of Ayodhya were full of anxiety and apprehension.

But, there were signs of good omen. The eyelids and right upper arm of Shri Bharata thrilled visibly which indicated that some good news was shortly expected. Shri Bharata went on cogitating:

जन अवगुन प्रभु मान न काऊ।
दीनबंधु अति मृदुल सुभाऊ।।

Shri Rama is not particular about the shortcomings of his devotees and others as he is too kind towards them.

At this juncture, Hanuman came to Ayodhya in the garb of a Brahmana and gave the news of Shri Rama's arrival at the outskirts of Ayodhya in Bibhisana's aerial chariot. Bharata rushed to Ayodhya from his camp and Hanuman bowing to Shri Bharata and conveying the news regarding Shri Rama's arrival returned to where Shri Rama was.

Then Bharata met Guru Vasistha and gave him the news. Shri Rama's household was informed. The mothers rushed out of their apartments to meet Shri Rama on arrival. The residents of Ayodhya, on being informed, thronged at the Ayodhya palace awaiting Shri Rama's arrival.

Ladies from all houses came out with articles of welcome like "durbagrass", raw rice, flowers, etc. to meet and welcome Shri Rama back. All of them went to meet Shri Rama near the aerial chariot. Shri Rama and Lakshmana ran out and bowed to Guru Vasistha near the chariot. Shri Rama then asked the chariot to be sent back to Varuna at Lanka.

On the other hand Shri Hanuman and other monkey friends, who accompanied Shri Rama, enjoyed the beautiful city of Ayodhya pointed out by Shri Rama.

Shri Rama and Lakshmana ran up to Guru Vasistha and bowed before him and other sages. When Guru Vasistha asked about their well-being, Shri Rama replied saying — "Due to your kindness we were quite all right during our stay in the forest."

Shri Rama bowed before all the Brahmanas whom he held in great esteem.

And Shri Bharata too bowed before Shri Rama and as in the words of the poet:

परे भूमि नहिं उठत उठाये। बर करि कृपा सिंधु उर लाये।।

In other words, Shri Bharata bowed before Shri Rama and would not like to get up leaving that celestial position. Shri Rama picked him up and clasped to his chest.

पुनि प्रभु हरषि सत्रुहन भेंटे हृदय लगाइ।
लछिमन भरत मिले तब परम प्रेम दोउ भाइ।।

Shri Rama then met youngest brother Satrughna clasping him to heart and Shri Lakshmana met brother Bharata each as happy as the other.

अमित रुप प्रगटे तेहि काला। जथा जोग मिले सबहि कृपाला।।

And Shri Rama noticing that every Ayodhya resident was overjoyed with love-devotion manifested himself in multifarious bodies and met them all as if each were meeting Shri Rama individually.

Then mothers Kousalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra ran out to meet the brothers Shri Rama and others eager and impatient like the cows for meeting their calves.

And Shri Sita met all the mothers-in-law and got their blessings. Further, Shri Rama introduced his friends who had accompanied him in the aerial chariot from Lanka viz. Hanuman, Angada, Sugriva and others to Guru Vasistha and other seniors. They all bowed to Guru Vasistha and got his blessings. Shri Rama mentioned of his friends saying—

ए सब सखा सुनहु मुनि मोरे। भए सभर सागर कंह बेरे।।
मम हित लागि जनम इन्ह हारे। भरतहु ते मोहि अधिक पिआरे।।

"These friends, Hanuman, Angada and Sugriva, were like boats in the sea of war and they were as though all born for helping me and as such are dear to me more than even Bharata."

CHAPTER XII

CORONATION OF SHRI RAMA

Then Shri Rama first went to mother Kaikeyi's apartment, bowed to her there and after getting her blessing left for his own apartment.

At this juncture, Guru Vasistha expressed saying: "Today is a very auspicious day for holding the 'Abhiseka' of Shri Rama to be anointed as Maharaja of Ayodhya." This was agreed to by all Brahmanas and learned persons present whereupon Guru Vasistha asked the palace helpers to arrange for the brothers and Shri Rama and Shri Sita. Guru Vasistha also informed and advised counsellor Sumantra to arrange for palanquins, carriages, chariots and all other necessary vehicles in consultation with him.

Thereafter Gods such as Brahma, Shiva and sages of various ranks came in their chariots to meet Shri Rama so dear to all of them. Sage Vasistha then asked for a suitable throne for the purpose of the Abhiseka and anointment of Shri Rama.

After Shri Rama and Shri Sita occupied their seats on the "Simhasana" (Throne) for the purpose of Abhiseka, the process thereof started with Guru Vasistha who gave the first sandal mark (Tilak) on the foreheads of Shri Rama and Shri Sita. This was followed by similar anointment by the senior Brahmanas and sages present. Mothers of Shri Rama and other brothers offered "Arati" to them on the Simhasana.

Brahmins and needy persons were given bounteous gifts. Bibhisana and Hanuman, Angada, Sugriva and other friends held 'chhatra' and 'chamar' on the occasion, as special honour to them.

On behalf of the Vedas prayers were offered to Shri Rama at the "Abhiseka" as in the following words of the poet:

जय सगुन निर्गुन रुप रुप अनूप भूप सिरोमने।
दसकंदरादि प्रचंड निसिचर प्रबल खल भुजबल हने।।

In other words, "Glory to you, O Shri Rama incarnated Almighty God in order to exterminate the vile demons who were oppressing and devouring the righteous sages and to establish the righteous persons and beings to enable them to pursue their noble work." That is for the purpose as declared by Shri Krishna in the subsequent incarnation as mentioned at the very start of this treatise. Then addressing the friends who came all the way from Lanka Shri Rama mentioned as in the words of the poet:

सब मम प्रिय नहिं तुम्हहि समाना।
मृषा न कहहुं मोर यह बाना।।

In other words, "None else is as dear to me as you, I say that from the core of my heart."

And as in the words of the poet:

तब प्रभु भूषन बसन मंगाए। नाना रंग अनूप सुहाए।।
सुग्रीवहि प्रथम पहिराये। बसन भरत निज हाथ बनाए।।
प्रभु प्रेरित लछिमन पहिराये। लंकापति रघुपति सन भाए।।
जामबंत नीलादि सब पहिराये रघुनाथ।
हिय धरि राम रुप सब, चले नाइ पद माथ।।

In other words, when time came for bidding adieu to friends who came all the way to Ayodhya accompanying Shri Rama, with the help of his brothers and by himself Shri Rama offered them suitable gifts and bade goodbye and good luck to them with heart full of affection and gratitude. They all took leave and bowed to Shri Rama before leaving.

Angada who was last to leave spoke to Hanuman to remind Shri Rama of him from time to time to continue to bear kindness and love to him.

In the words of the poet:

कुलिसहि चाहि कठोर अति, कोमल कुसुमहि चाहि।
चित खगेस राम करि, समुझि परइ कछु काहि।।

In other words — says the poet, "Shri Rama's heart is softer

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चित खगेस राम करि, समुझि परइ कछु काहि।।

In other words — says the poet, "Shri Rama's heart is softer than flower and at times harder than thunder. He loves all and particularly the lowly and can also bid adieu to them when the time is ripe for that."

Then Shri Rama sent for Guha, the Nishada chief, and bequeathed gold and gems and silks adding, "Go home friend, do remember me at times and never swerve from righteous path. You are more than brother Bharata to me. Do sometimes visit us here when you find time."

CHAPTER XIII

RAMA RAJYA

The Ayodhya residents were all happy with Shri Rama and content with themselves, bearing no ill-will to any,

बयरू न कर काहू सन कोई। राम प्रताप विषमता खोई।।

and following Shri Rama's example the residents of Ayodhya loved one another unmindful of the difference in status and calling. So, they all lived happily bearing no ill-will towards any. That kept them cheerful, happy and healthy.

Numerous Aswamedha sacrifices were performed by Shri Rama in pursuance of which the have-nots got bounteous gifts, Brahmanas recited the Vedas from scriptures, Shri Sita always performed as would behove Shri Rama obeying the scriptures on obedience to seniors, parents, husband and elders in clan and family.

All brothers loved and revered Shri Rama and loved one another. And so too behaved their consorts towards Shri Sita and to each other.

In due course, Shri Sita was blessed with two sons who were named as Laba and Kusha. Each brother in due course was also blessed with two sons each. They all grew up in the light and blessing of Shri Rama and Shri Sita who were ideal beings in all respects. Shri Rama was aware of the deep respect with which his brothers held him dearly in their hearts and took it as a duty to show exemplary conduct to them, fit for all to follow.

The brothers used to take bath and food together. They were respectful to the sages like Narada and Sanaka who used to frequently visit them to meet Shri Rama. The Ayodhya residents also followed the example of Shri Rama and brothers to raise a garden of fruits and flowers on each homestead.

At one place seeing sage Sanaka and some other sages coming Shri Rama and brothers bowed before them and Shri Rama spread out his shawl for the respected sages to sit upon.

Shri Rama said, "I am fortunate to have met all of you together. It is great indeed to be able to get the company of the sages and learned however brief it may be." The sages were overwhelmed with love and sang in praise of Shri Rama. Then, they left after blessing Shri Rama and brothers.

At this juncture, Shri Rama noticed from the faces of the brothers as if they desired to ask something, but were unable to open their lips as would behove juniors before seniors. Hanuman who was there came to their rescue and addressing Shri Rama said, "O Lord, Shri Bharata wants to clarify his mind on some questions."

Shri Rama remarked saying, "O Hanuman you know I keep no difference between me and Bharata." Then, Bharata bowed before Shri Rama and caught hold of his feet and with humility said, "O Lord, I want to know the essential traits of the sage and the difference between the sage and the vile."

Shri Rama smiled and said, "Between the sage and the vile the difference one can see by recalling the connection between the axe and the sandalwood. The axe may be likened to the vile and the sandalwood to the sage. The axe in cutting the sandalwood no doubt causes wound to the latter, but the sandalwood imparts its sweet smell to the axe in the process. So is the context between the 'sant' and the vile. The axe cuts the sandalwood, the wood remains quiet and bears the brunt of the cut. On the other hand, it imparts its sweet smell to the axe."

In the words of the poet:

ताते सुर सीसन्ह चढ़त, जगबल्लभ श्रीखंड।
अनल दाहि पीटत घनहिं, परसु बदन यह दंड।।

For its good quality sandal paste is welcomed when put on anybody's head including heads of Gods and saints, and the axe has its head put into fire and bored for the handle to be lodged in it.

And, Shri Rama added saying — "O Bharata, whoever is merciful and bountiful to the poor and disabled, is beloved of God."

कोमल चित दीनन्ह पर दाया। मन क्रम बचन मम भगति अमाया।।
सबहि मान प्रद आपु अमानी। भरत प्रान सम मम ते प्रानी।।

Shri Rama further added — "He who has discarded desires, recites God's Name, who is humble, peace loving, and happy in mind, is friend to all, sober and simple hearted, who loves the saints and the learned Brahmanas, know it that such a man is a saint or sage."

"Further too who views both praise and rebuke all alike — he is true 'sant' or sage."

Said Shri Rama, "Now listen to the nature of the vile. Never even by mistake befriend such a person for that is productive of sorrows only. As the company of the vile cow puts the good cow in distress, so is the company of the vile. It brings sorrow even to the good natured. The vile burns at heart out of jealousy of the prosperity of others. Defamation of another gladdens him as if he had got a piece of gem. He is subject to lust, anger and greed, is unkind, vile in nature, picks up enmity with others for no reason and does harm to one who does him good, all his dealings of give and take are vicious talks in sweet words like the peacock whose food is poisonous snake and heart rank filled.

"Further, the vile person opposes even his own family members to safeguard his selfish interest, pays scant attention to words of advice of parents, preceptors and well-wishers, his words are always self-centred, eager to appropriate others' wealth.

"There were few such men in "Treta Yuga". Their number increased to some extent in Dwapar. But in Kali, their number will swell up immeasurably."

Concluding Shri Rama said as in the words of the poet:

पर हित सरिस धरम नहिं भाई।
पर पीड़ा सम नहिं अधमाई।।

In other words, Shri Rama in conclusion said, "There is no righteousness greater than helping another and vile quality than putting another to sorrow and pain."

The brothers Bharata and others hearing Shri Rama's advice were happy to have acquired true knowledge and expressed gratitude and bowed to brother Rama.

Then, Shri Rama made ready to leave for his apartment and brothers Bharata and others took leave of Shri Rama to repair to theirs.

A few days after arrival at Ayodhya, Shri Rama invited Guru Vasistha, sages, saints, learned Brahmanas and senior citizens of Ayodhya. Welcoming them, Shri Rama said, “Do listen to me O co-residents of Ayodhya. I wish to make some suggestions for your consideration, not with the object of imposing my will on you. If you like and approve do practise them or as many of them as you like to adopt. Those which do not meet with your approval give them a go bye.”

“If, on the other hand, I suggest something which is or appears to be unrighteous forget about them.”

"Being born as humans we should not aim for only worldly pleasures. No wise and learned person accepts that as aim of human life. On the other hand, the human body is the boat for crossing the turbulent sea of life by engaging in righteous deeds and taking the shelter of the Almighty Father."

“The way of knowledge to realise God is beset with many hurdles which cannot be overcome without the help of God. And, help of God is obtained by offering Him love-devotion or Bhakti.”

Proceeding to explain the path of devotion, Shri Rama said as in the words of the poet:

कहहु भगति पथ कवन प्रयासा। जोग न मख जप तप उपवासा।।
सरल सुभाव न मन कुटिलाई। यथा लाभ संतोष सदाई।।

In other words, Shri Rama explained that the way of Bhakti is not to engage in fasting and performing sacrifices. Simple habits of day-to-day duties without any unrighteous design in any way against anybody, no dispute and enmity with anyone, no desire to acquire mundane wealth and property, nor envy anyone for his wealth or prosperity comprise of Bhakti or love-devotion to God.

On hearing the words of Shri Rama, the assembled Ayodhya residents were very happy. No one had advised us like that they observed among themselves and promised that they would follow the path shown to them by Shri Rama.

Once, thereafter, sage Vasistha visited Shri Rama and said, "O Shri Rama my heart is drawn towards you after hearing you in the public meeting and seeing your deeds of righteousness. It is not by instituting sacrifices at the instance of priests, but by righteous deeds that one can hope to gain God Almighty's shelter; love-devotion to Almighty is more fruitful than all rituals undertaken as the poet says:

तब पद पंकज प्रीति निरंतर। सब साधन कर यह फल सुंदर।।
प्रेम भगति जल बिनु रघुराई। अभिअंतर मल कबहुं न जाई।।

In other words, above all other efforts to gain cleanliness of mind and heart, is true and deep love-devotion to Almighty Father. The dirt that sticks to the mind and heart is otherwise hard to be washed clean.

And further:

मिलहि न रघुपति बिनु अनुरागा।
किये जोग तप ग्यान बिरागा।।

In other words, without love-devotion to the Almighty mere acquisition of knowledge and discarding of desires from heart will not bring realisation of God-Almighty.

On the other hand, in the words of the poet:

मोह न अंध कीन्ह केहि केही। को जग काम नचाव न जेही।।
तृष्णा केहि न कीन्ह बौराहा। केहि कर ह्रदय क्रोध नहिं राहा।।
ग्यानी तापस सूर कवि कोबिद गुन आगार।
केहि कैं लोभ बिडंबना, कीन्हि न एहि संसार।।

In other words: Is there any on earth who has not been blinded by attachment? Whom has not lust made to dance? Whom desire has not made deaf here? Whose heart has not been charred by ire? Whose mind has not been bewitched by greed, however wise and learned he may be?

Further, whom have the three family, wealth and envy not bewildered on earth?

The great Shiva and Brahma are also afraid of all these enemies, what to speak of the mortals of earth.

For, illusion has covered the entire beings of earth whose agents are lust, ire and greed and other powerful ones to smother all of them.

So, man has to make every effort to avoid being subject to any of the agents of illusion. The beginning of that is painful no doubt, as for the child to accept drugs for cure. In the words of the poet:

जद्यपि प्रथम दुख पावइ, रोवइ बाल अधीर।
ब्याधि नास हित जननी गनति न सो सिसु पीर।।
तिमि रघुपति निज दासकर हरहिं मान हित लागि।

In other words: For curing the child of his ailment the mother administers bitter drugs which makes the child cry but ultimately he is cured of the ailment; so the graceful God discards the vile qualities of His devotee sometimes putting him to discomfort and pain.

And further,

रामचन्द्र के भजन बिनु, जो चह पद निर्बान।
ज्ञानबंत अपि सो नर, पसु बिनु पुच्छ बिसान।।

Without taking shelter of the Almighty and taking His Name if any hopes to gain salvation he is no doubt a beast of course without a tail."

And later, Shri Rama averred as in the words of the poet:

भगतिवंत अति नीचउ प्रानी। मोहि प्रान प्रिय अस मम बानी।।

In other words — Shri Rama then declared, "I tell you truly, to me none other than my devotee is dearer in the Universe. He may be of lowly caste — no matter." Shri Rama also declared — as in the words of the poet:

पुरुष नपुंसक नारि बा जीव चराचर कोई।
सर्व भाब भज कपट तजि मोहि परम प्रिय सोई।।

In other words: Shri Rama declared that "male or female, eunuch or any other being, if he or she with a clean mind and heart meditates me with sincerity, he/she is dear to me without doubt."

And further Bhusundi Kaka said as in the words of the poet:

जप तप मख सम दम ब्रत नाना। बिरति बिवेक जोग बिग्याना।।
सब कर फल रघुपति पद प्रेमा। तेहि बिनु कोइ न पावइ छेमा।।

In other words, said the bird: "The efforts made by means of meditation, fasting, gifts and knowledge can be fruitful only if the seeker has love-devotion for God Almighty. Without that the efforts will not bear fruit at all."

"On earth all beings are steeped in their selfish motives, those who can make shows are known as sant, intelligent who misappropriate others' wealth, the light hearted who talks too much is called meritorious, the fatter the knot of hair on head and longer the nails is famed as "Tapas". In Kali Yuga, this will be the general trend. All men are in the grip of sex."

In the words of the poet:

बहु दाम सँवारहि धाम जाती। बिषया हरिलीन्ह न रहि बिरती।।
तपसी धनवंत दरिद्र गृही। कलि कौतुक न जात कही।।

In others words — in Kali Yuga, the "Tapas" decorates his Ashram with costly articles, if his wealth dwindles he abandons his Ashram, the Tapas is rich, the householder poor, the features of Kali are wonderful.

The son obeys the parents till he comes under influence of his wife on marriage. The only sign of the Brahmin is his sacred thread.

In the words of the poet:

सुन ब्यालारि काल कलि मल अवगुन आगार।
गुनहि बहुत कलि जुग कर, बिनु प्रयास निस्तार।।

In other words, the scriptures have laid down the ways prescribed for gaining salvation in the four Ages of Satya, Treta, Dwapar and Kali.

For Satya Age, the way prescribed is meditation of the Almighty; for Treta various sacrifices, the fruits of which have to be oblated to God Almighty; for Dwapar, the way is worship of Almighty and for Kali singing of Lord's praise only and making gifts to the poor.

The importance of these has been prescribed in addition to singing the praise of God-Almighty, as in the words of the poet:

प्रगट चारि पद धरम के, कलि महु एक प्रधान।
जेन केन बिधि दीन्हे दान करइ कल्यान।।

In other words, out of the prescribed ways, the importance of the way of gifts to the poor in one or other way is underscored for Kali.

The four Ages have their separate features as scriptures do denote. They are as in the words of the poet:

सत्व बहुत रज कछु रति कर्मा। सब बिधि सुख त्रेता कर धर्मा।।
बहु रज स्वल्प सत्व कछु तामस। द्वापर धर्म हर्ष भय मानस।।
तामस बहुत रजोगुन थोरा। कलि प्रभाव बिरोध चहुं ओर।।
बुध धर्म जानि मन माहीं। तजि अधर्म रति धर्म कराहीं।।
काल धर्म नहिं ब्यापहिं ताहीं। रघुपति चरन प्रीति अति जाहीं।।

In other words: The main features of the four Ages have been delineated in the scriptures. These are: in the Satya Age most will abide by truth interspersed with some middlings of Raja type. In Treta Age the proportion of Satya or truthful and middlings will be almost equal with few of the base type. In Dwapar, more of righteous and happy but unsteady of mind and in Kali, the good qualities will be thrown to the winds, the vile swelling up in number.

मो सम दीन न दीन हित, तुम्ह समान रघुवीर।
अस बिचारि रघुवंस मनि, हरहु बिषम भव भीर।।

"O Lord, I am poorest of all poor, none other than you more kind and helpful to the poor. Do be merciful to me, Shri Rama, do protect me from the onslaughts of unrighteousness."

CHAPTER XIV

CONCLUSION

In conclusion it may be said that the major mission of the Almighty in incarnating as Shri Rama in Treta Age was not only extermination of Ravana of Lanka who was a menace to other beings in Lanka and elsewhere on earth and gods of heaven, but also to help the common mass of mankind to learn and maintain righteous conduct, helpful to one another in all matters all over earth.

A few instances thereof are mentioned here for recapitulation of the genial reader.

While wandering in the forests in search of Shri Sita when Shri Rama and Lakshmana reached Kiskinda territory they were noticed walking down the foothill on top of which Sugriva, younger brother of Bali, king of Kiskinda, had concealed himself to escape the persecution of Bali who had not only harassed and driven him out from his palace but also abducted his younger brother Sugriva's wife.

With the help of Hanuman, who established friendship of Sugriva and Shri Rama, in order to help friend Sugriva, Shri Rama slayed Bali in the encounter between the brothers, Bali and Sugriva. When Bali fell down to the ground to the shaft of Shri Rama, being moved by the wailing of Tara, Bali's wife, Shri Rama met Bali in that condition. Bali poured out his anger in hot words addressing Shri Rama and accusing him of slaying him as a mere hunter from behind a tree trunk. Shri Rama justified his action promptly replying as in the words of the poet which merit repetition:

धर्महेतु अवतरेहु गुसाईं। मारेहु मोहि ब्याध की नाईं।।

To that, Shri Rama promptly replied, saying:

अनुज बधू भगिनी सुत नारी। सुनु सठ कन्या सम ए चारी।।
इनहिं कुदृष्टि बिलोकइ जोई। ताहि बधे कुछ पाप न होई।।

In other words, Shri Rama replied to Bali saying, "There is no sin in slaying the man who casts lustful look at his younger brother's wife who is rightly equated with one's sister, daughter-in-law, and daughter."

This is a glaring instance of the innumerable words of advice and warning of Shri Rama and the account of his righteous deeds in the scripture to maintain good conduct and relationship among humans in all spheres on earth. These have been pointed out at the proper places as the scripture goes on unfolding in the studies made in these pages.

Further, the friendship that Shri Rama picked up with the common men of the forests exemplified in the case of the boatman, Nishada Guha, and the old tribal dame Shabari, the compassion shown to birds and beasts in distress are bright examples of the universal love and compassion which should be the guiding principles of human conduct on earth.

My effort to compile this will earn its own reward if the words of advice and warning of Shri Rama and his deeds draw the attention and interest of the genial reader and be of help to him/her in leading a worthy earthly life.

Before closing one would like to make a guess as to whether it will be appropriate in view of Shri Rama's thought, words and deeds to apply the appellation of "Maryadapurusha" or righteous or the emblem of compassion or "Dayanidhi" to him.

Both the appellations are held by various classes of people equally applicable and appropriate for Shri Rama and the scales are almost even on the popular estimation, for countless people hold Shri Rama as "Maryadapurusha" or emblem of righteousness and equally large number also hold him as "Dayasagara" or sea of compassion.

The acid test may be the case of the exile of Shri Sita by Shri Rama on the imputation of the washerwoman of Ayodhya after Shri Rama's and Shri Sita's return to Ayodhya. The washerwoman was vilified by her husband for overstaying in her father's house on the imputation of her loose character. She cited the instance of Shri Sita's long stay in Ravana's Ashoka Garden. "She was readily accepted by Shri Rama. Why should my stay in my father's house be looked down upon with suspicion", urged the washerwoman arguing with her husband.

Shri Rama's decision to exile Shri Sita was influenced by the casual mention by the washerwoman of Shri Sita's case as a case in point and Shri Rama decreeing thereupon an indefinite exile for Shri Sita. This would show that Shri Rama was temperamentally and basically a "Maryadapurusha" or righteous type more than a "Dayasagara" or "Compassionate" type, tipping the scale down on the righteous side.

I would also draw the genial readers' attention to the advice held out by Shri Rama to the Ayodhya residents in the public meeting called by him of which an account has been given in the latter part of Chapter XIII on "Rama Rajya". Great emphasis has been laid by Shri Rama on maintenance of righteousness which would tip the scale on the side of 'Maryadapurusha' character of Shri Rama.

The genial reader is invited to apply his/her personal inclination and estimation to the issue to form his/her own conviction to come to the conclusion that appears to be appropriate to him/her.

I shall be highly obliged if the reader kindly favours me in due course with his/her own estimation in the matter.

GLOSSARY

Ahalya	Wife of Sage Goutama — was released from curse of Goutama from boulder state on being touched by Shri Rama.
Anasuya	Chaste wife of Sage Atri from whom Shri Sita learnt principles of love-devotion to God.
Angada	Son of Bali, a great devotee of Shri Rama.
Bali	Elder brother of Sugriva whom Bali harassed.
Bibhisana	Youngest brother of Ravana a great devotee of Shri Rama — was made king of Lanka on the fall of Ravana.
Guha	Nishada chieftain friend of Shri Rama who helped the latter during his exile.
Janaka	King of Mithila, father-in-law of Shri Rama.
Jatayu	The great kite bird who fought Ravana while the latter was abducting Shri Sita from Panchabati forest and informed Shri Rama when along with brother Lakshmana he searched for Shri Sita.
Kopa Mandira	"Ire room". A member of the Royal family would retire to the anger room till the cause of anger was removed by intervention of seniors.
Mandodari	Wife of Ravana, King of Lanka, who adored Shri Rama.
Manthara	A vile maid of Queen Kaikeyi whose evil advice poisoned Queen Kaikeyi's mind against Shri Rama.
Maricha	The crafty demon who in the guise of golden deer helped Ravana to abduct Shri Sita.

Nala & Nila	Monkey craftsmen with the special gift of causing weightlessness to stones and timber by touch.
Nandigram	At the outskirts of Ayodhya where on return from Chitrakuta after meeting Shri Rama, Bharata established Shri Rama's throne and putting Shri Rama's wooden sandals.as representing Shri Rama, engaged in the worship thereof and in looking after Ayodhya kingdom's affairs on behalf of Shri Rama.
Rameswaram	Name of Shiva installed by Shri Rama at the bridgehead to Lanka built by the monkey craftsmen and workers.
Srupanakha	Sister of Ravana who was made nose and ears bereft by Lakshmana for herhe may be misdemeanour.
Sugriva	Younger brother of Bali King of Kiskinda who befriended Shri Rama and helped him in the war against Ravana.
Sumantra	Counsellor to King Dasaratha.
Susena	A monkey medical expert of Lanka who cured Lakshmana of the serious wound received from the celestial shaft (Brahmastra) of Ravana.
Varadwaja	Great sage whose hermitage in the Dandakaranya was visited by Shri Rama during his exile.
Vasistha	Preceptor of Shri Rama and brothers.
Viswamitra	A great sage whom Shri Rama and Lakshmana accompanied to Bideha (Mithila) where marriages of Shri Rama to Shri Sita and her three sisters to three brothers of Rama were performed.

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The author, Shri Gananath Das, retired from the Indian Administrative Service in the year 1972. Since then he has engaged himself in the study of various saint poets starting with the famous saint poet, Kabir Das, of the 15th century A.D.

On Kabir his works include Life and Philosophy of the Saint Poet in Oriya, and translation of five hundred of his couplets in English Verse, in three volumes: the first of one hundred published by the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan of Bombay in 1992, the second of three hundred published by Motilal Banarsidass of Delhi in 1991 and the third of one hundred published by Writers Workshop of Calcutta in 1992, followed by Sayings of Kabir published by the same publisher in 1993.

In 1992 he published his translation of one hundred songs of Guru Nanak Dev as 'Nanak Satak' in Oriya and 100 Love Songs of Kabir in English Verse which was published by Abhinav Publications of New Delhi.

In 1994 he published his Oriya Verse translation of the entire Thiru Kural, the immortal work of the Tamil Saint Poet Thiru Valluvar, consisting of 1330 couplets in 133 chapters.

In 1994 he published his Essays on Kabir published by the Writers Workshop of Calcutta consisting of indepth studies of the Saint Poet's Sayings on as many as 22 topics.

In the meantime he has completed his "Readings from Bhagabata", being English Verse translation of over 150 Sayings of the famous scripture originally composed by Vyasa Deva and translated into Oriya Verse by Saint Poet Jagannath Das of 'Pancha Sakhā' fame.

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